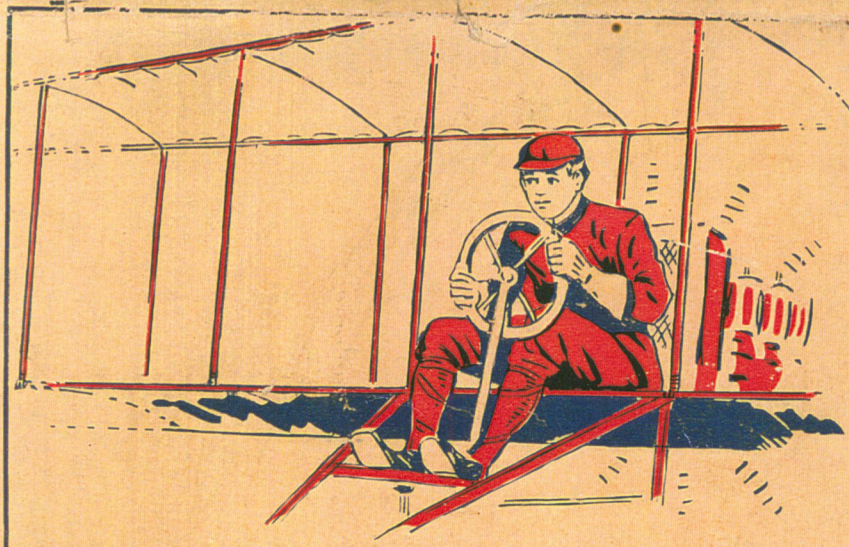

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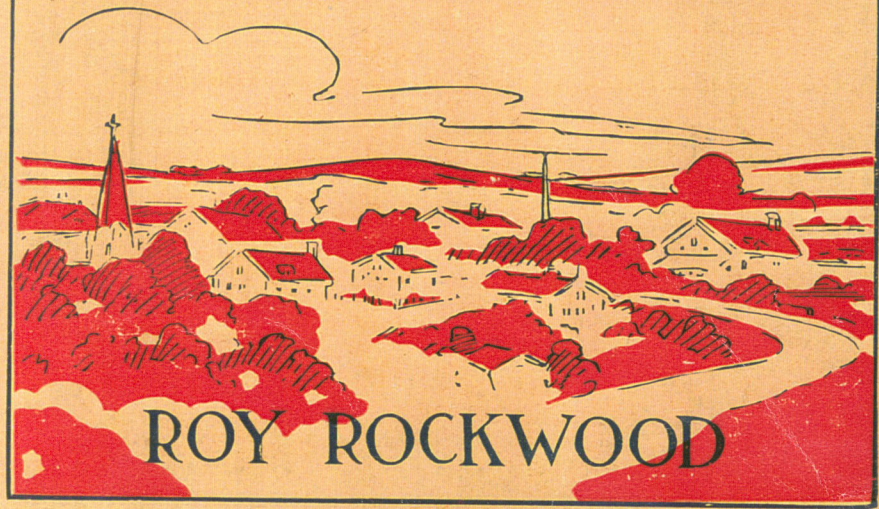

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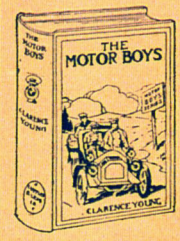

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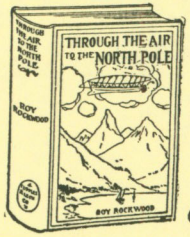

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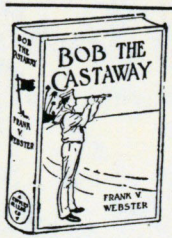

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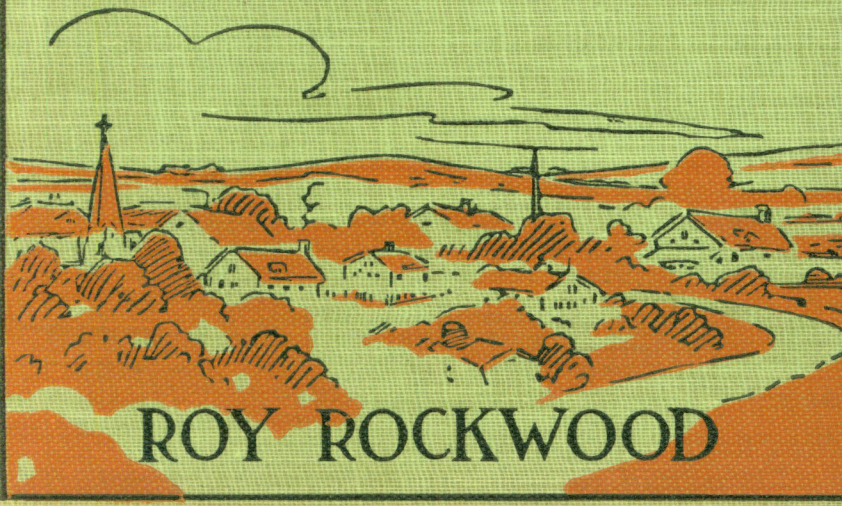

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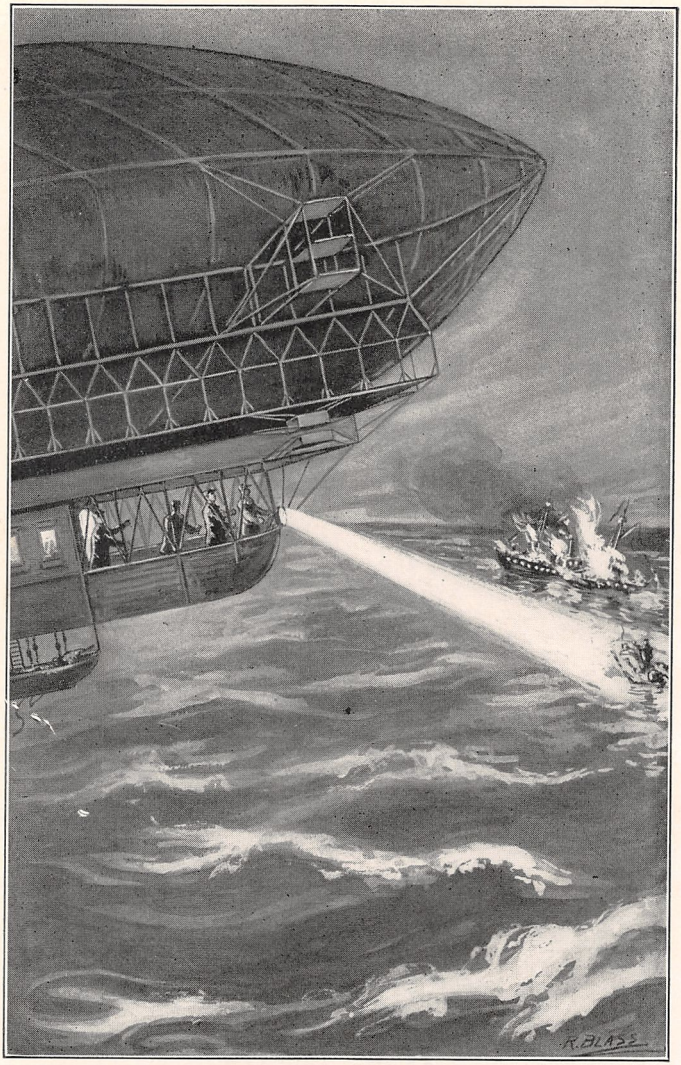

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BY

ROY ROCKWOOD

AUTHOR OF "DAVE DASHAWAY THE YOUNG AVIATOR," "THE SPEEDWELL BOYS SERIES," "THE GREAT MARVEL SERIES," ETC.

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DAVE DASHAWAY AND HIS GIANT AIRSHIP

CHAPTER I

THE GIANT AIRSHIP

"Is that your airship?"

"Not exactly, but I am in charge of it."

"The *Gossamer,* isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Belongs to the Interstate Aero Company?"

"You're pretty well posted, I see."

"Ought to be. I'm close to the Interstate people, so I'd like to look the machine over. In fact, if you've got an expert aviator on hand, I think I'll take a little flight."

John Grimshaw, ex-balloonist and battered-up aeronaut, regarded the foppishly dressed young man before him quizzically.

"Oh, you do, eh?" he observed, very dryly. "Well, it won't be on this occasion. As to an expert aviator, we've got Dave Dashaway."

"Yes, I've heard of him."

"Most everybody has, I reckon. He's here on business though, and that sign is for outsiders, yourself included.

Old Grimshaw pointed to a sign on the big gates

of the high board enclosure outside of which he stood on guard. It read: "No Admittance." The visitor had come strolling from the direction of some summer cottages near a pretty lake close by. Grimshaw surmised that he was one of the smart set spending an outing there.

"Humph!" observed the young man, with a shrug of his shoulders and a scowl. "Pretty independent, aren't you? I think you'll change your tune shortly."

"Is that so?"

"I fancy. I'll bring somebody with me who will do what he chooses with your precious old airship, and send you about your business, if he feels like it."

The young man turned on his heel, mad as a hornet, as he spoke. Just then the gate was pushed open, and a bright-faced, athletic young fellow stepped into view.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Grimshaw?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Another of those pestiferous nuisances, who want to pry into other people's business, and think they own the world," grumbled the veteran aeronaut.

"What did he want?"

John Grimshaw told his story.

"Oh, you might have gratified his curiosity and let him look around a little."

"See here, Dave Dashaway," bristled up Grimshaw, "you've seen in the past what taking in a stranger led to. You're here for a special purpose, and no Jerry Dawson, or fellows of that stripe, are going to get a chance to trick us again."

"That's so, Mr. Grimshaw, we can't be too careful, I will admit," agreed the young aviator.

He was a rather unassuming young fellow for a person of his merits and record, was this active lad who inside of three months had made his way from humble circumstances to the very front rank of American airmen.

Dave Dashaway looked back over the past twelve weeks of his young career with pride, pleasure and satisfaction. There were dark spots, of course. The Jerry Dawson old Grimshaw had mentioned was one of them. Envious rivals there had been, too. Danger, scheming, cunning had more than once threatened.

That bright, breezy afternoon, however, the accredited pilot of the latest monoplane on exhibition, Dave Dashaway felt like a general who had won a hard-fought battle and was resting on his laurels.

Those who have read the first volume of the present series, entitled, "Dave Dashaway, the Young Aviator; Or, In the Clouds for Fame and Fortune," will recall how humble and difficult was the start in life made by the bright young

aeronaut. The father of Dave had been a noted balloonist. Dave was of tender age when he died. For years the boy was made a drudge by a miserly old guardian. The finding of a prize medal and other valuables accidentally lost from an airship, sent Dave on his travels seeking their owner, Robert King, a noted airman, who gave Dave a job.

It seemed as though air sailing was born in Dave. He took to aviation like a duck does to water. The youth did several helpful things at the various aero meets for Mr. King that won his confidence and friendship. Dave studied all the books he could get hold of on airships, and Grimshaw, a crippled and retired balloonist, took him into his school.

From the initial run made on a dummy aeroplane along the ground, to his first aerial flight in a monoplane with Mr. King, Dave showed intelligence, skill and ambition. Then came his first brilliant flight in the *Baby Racer,* a show biplane. So well did the young aviator manage the *Racer,* that its owner, the Interstate Aero Company, made a contract with him for regular exhibitions.

Dave did not disappoint his liberal employers in his efforts. He won several prizes, gave a big lift to a chum, Hiram Dobbs, in the aero field, and made old Grimshaw proud of so apt a pupil.

In the second volume of the present series, called, "Dave Dashaway and His Hydroplane; Or, Daring Adventures Over the Great Lakes," is told how Dave advanced another important step up the ladder of fame and fortune. The company employing him started him at exhibiting their model hydroplane. This was a new venture for Dave, but he industriously mastered its details and made a great hit at an aero meet near Chicago.

All along the line Dave had been forced to oppose the envy and malice of unprincipled business rivals. By thinking straight and acting straight, however, he had won out on every occasion, as an honest, deserving lad always does. He and his young protege, Hiram Dobbs, by making a hundred mile record flight one dark and stormy night, got a big order for the Interstate Aero Company ahead of a competitor. Then Jerry Dawson, his father and a smuggler stole the hydro-monoplane, *Drifter,* and located across the Canadian border. Dave and his friends began a wonderful chase in another machine. They had some stirring adventures, ending in the discovery of the *Drifter.*

That incident shut out the Dawsons from later aero meets, but, as they had not been prosecuted, they became hangers-on at circus and county fair exhibitions. Dave heard of them once in awhile,

but they seemed unlikely to injure him any farther.

Dave and Hiram were finely rewarded by the Interstate people for their success. The company wanted Dave to make a two-year contract to exhibit their machines. Dave, however, was obliged to decline the offer.

There was a strong reason for this—a reason that was enough to set on fire the enthusiasm of any live, up-to-date boy.

As related in the preceding volume, Dave had discovered an old friend of his dead father, one Cyrus Dale. This gentleman was wealthy, had no family, and had been a fellow balloonist of Mr. Dashaway, years before. A boy who had stolen some papers from Dave had succeeded in palming himself off on Mr. Dale as Dave Dashaway.

Mr. King had unmasked the imposter. The latter, with some friends, had then kidnapped Mr. Dale. The veteran aviator, Robert King, had rescued Mr. Dale from their clutches. The gratitude of the latter for this act, together with his warm interest in Dave, had led to the three coming together in a most friendly way. It was this ideal situation which had resulted in the carrying out of a long-cherished plan of Mr. King.

This was nothing less than a scheme for crossing the Atlantic in a giant airship. It had been

the pet idea of the skilled aviator for years—the hope and dream of every ambitious airman in the world.

Of all men in the field, Mr. King had the ability to direct such a project. Mr. Dale was not only willing but ready to supply the capital. As to Dave and Hiram, they talked constantly of the enterprise daytimes and dreamed of it nights.

The plan of the veteran aviator, however, was one that involved time, skill and expense. His plans for building the great airship were very elaborate. A month had now gone by, and only the skeleton of the mammoth air traveler had so far been constructed.

A temporary aerodrome had been constructed on the edge of a large city about twenty-five miles from Lake Linden, where we find the young aviator at the opening of the present story. There Mr. King, Mr. Dale and some skilled workmen were energetically pushing forward their work. If their plans did not go awry, before the end of August the giant airship would start out on the strangest, grandest trip ever attempted in the field of aeronautics.

In the meantime the Interstate Aero Company had prevailed on Dave to give them a month's special service. This comprised the exhibition of their latest hydro-monoplane, the *Gossamer,* at Lake Linden. The district was one visited every

summer by men of wealth from New York, Boston and other large cities. The Interstate people had secured what had once been a small private park. Here Dave, Hiram and Mr. Grimshaw had been located for over a week.

The object of their exhibitions was to influence a sale of the Interstate machines among the rich men visiting Lake Linden. Many of them were aero enthusiasts. Besides that, the proprietors of the resort paid the company quite a large fee for making occasional flights as an attraction to popularize the lake.

Dave glanced after the man who had just had the verbal tussle with Mr. Grimshaw. He did not like his trivial looks any more than the old balloonist had. They had many curious visitors at the enclosure, however, and Dave forgot the strange brag of the latest one, as he looked down the road in the direction of the town of Linden.

"It's strange Hiram doesn't get back with the carryall," remarked the young aviator.

"Yes, I heard the train come in half an hour ago," replied Grimshaw. "Expecting quite a crowd, aren't you, Dashaway?"

"Why, yes, according to the message the Interstate people sent me," said Dave. "It seems there is a special party of foreign airmen our New York salesman has interested. Some of them have come over to take a try at the meets

in the Southern circuit, and want to buy machines."

"They'll find ours the best," asserted Grimshaw.

"I think that, too," agreed Dave. "That's why I've got everything spick and span inside there. The *Gossamer* looks as if she was just waiting to float like an eagle at the word."

"She's a beauty, and no mistake," declared Grimshaw, and like some ardent horseman gazing at a fond pet, he pushed open the gate, and fixed his eyes on the hydro-aeroplane in the middle of the enclosure. "She's the last word in airships," boasted the old enthusiast. "That trial flight of yours yesterday, Dashaway, was the prettiest piece of air work I ever saw."

Intimate as the young aviator was with the *Gossamer* and every detail of her delicate mechanism, he could not resist the fascination of looking over the most beautiful model in the airship field.

The *Gossamer* had proven a revelation, even to skilled airmen. It had been constructed in strict secrecy. The public had known nothing as to the details of the craft until it was taken out on Lake Linden to test its balance and speed.

It was equipped to carry four passengers, was driven by a forty horse-power motor, and made the tremendous speed of fifty miles an hour in the water and sixty miles an hour in the air. With

its two propellers driven by clutch and chain transmission, and its new automatic starter and fuel gauge, it was a marvel of beauty and utility, as readily sent up from the confined deck of a warship as from the broadest aero field.

"She's a bird, sure enough," declared old Grimshaw, admiringly.

"Wasn't she sort of built for a bird?" challenged Dave, with a smile.

"That's so. Ah, I hear the wagon. Hiram is coming."

The two went outside the enclosure, and the man looked keenly down the road in the direction of the village.

"Why Dashaway," he exclaimed, "it's Hiram, but he isn't bringing the party you expected."

"That's queer," commented the young aviator.

"He's all alone—oh, no, he isn't. He's got one passenger aboard—a girl."

"A girl?" repeated Dave, staring somewhat mystified at the approaching vehicle.

"Yes."

"That's queerer still," remarked the young aviator.

CHAPTER II

"FOR MOTHER'S SAKE"

"WHOA!" sang out Hiram Dobbs, bringing the team to a halt and beckoning to Dave.

"Why, what's the trouble, Hiram?" inquired the young aviator.

"Crowd didn't come, that's all."

"And no word from them?"

"Why, yes, there was a wire," and Dave's friend and assistant handed a yellow sheet to Dave with the explanation: "Operator at the station gave it to me that way. A rush, so I read it."

"That's all right," returned Dave, and he also read the brief dispatch in his turn.

It stated that there had come an unexpected hitch in the arrangements of the New York agent of the Interstate people, and that the party he had in tow would not visit Lake Linden until the following day.

"That's good," said Dave. "It will give us a chance to go to the city and see how our giant airship scheme is coming on."

"Fine!" applauded Hiram. "There's something I wanted to talk to you about first, though, Dave."

"What's that, Hiram?"

"Wait a moment, Miss."

Hiram interrupted with these words, addressed to the only passenger in the carryall. For the first time Dave glanced at her closely. She was a plainly-dressed, modest-looking girl of about sixteen. Her eyes were red with weeping. She held a handkerchief in her hand, and was pale and seemed greatly distressed.

"Oh, I must make you no farther trouble," she said, in a broken tone. "I will get out of the carryall here and walk the rest of the way to the seminary."

"I want to speak to my friend here first, Miss," said Hiram. "You just wait. Maybe he can suggest some way to help you out."

"You have been so kind to me already," murmured the girl.

Dave wondered what was up. The carryall was a hired one, and he had supposed at first that Hiram had given the girl a lift, finding she was going his way. Hiram was always doing such kindly things.

The forlorn appearance of the girl, however, and the rather serious manner of Hiram as he jumped from the wagon seat and beckoned Dave

out of earshot of his passenger, made the young aviator surmise that he had something of particular moment to impart to him.

"Now then, what is it, Hiram?" he asked.

"You see that girl?"

"Of course."

"I never felt so sorry for anyone in my life as I do for her."

"Who is she?"

"A poor girl working her way through the young ladies' seminary up at the other end of the lake."

"Oh, I see."

"It seems she got a telegram about an hour ago. It is from her home, a hundred miles west of here. It stated that her mother was in a critical condition, and if she expected to see her alive she must take the first train for Easton. She hurried to the depot. I found her there crying as if her heart would break."

"Poor girl! she had missed the train."

"By just four minutes, and no other until eight o'clock this evening."

"I am dreadfully sorry for her," said Dave, glancing with genuine sympathy at the girl in the carryall.

Hiram fidgeted about. He dug the toe of his shoe into the dirt. Then he looked Dave daringly in the eye. Then he dropped his glance. Dave

was quick to read his impetuous and open-hearted comrade's thoughts.

"I fancy I guess what's in your mind, Hiram," he said.

"I hope you do, anyhow. Say, if I knew how to run an airship like you——"

"You'd run it to Easton, I suppose?" intimated Dave.

"Yes, sir, that's just what I would do. See here, Dave, suppose you had a sister in the trouble that young girl is in?"

Dave put up his hand interruptingly. His face was earnest and serious.

"I'd get her to her mother if I had to sell the shoes off my feet. You're a grand-hearted fellow, Hiram Dobbs, and, as I'll not let you beat me in the doing-good line, why——"

"You'll take her to her mother in the *Gossamer*?" fairly shouted Hiram, dancing from one foot to the other in his excitement over such a prospect.

"I'll try and make it out that way," responded Dave. "Let me think for a minute or two, Hiram."

The young aviator took another look at the mournful face of the young girl in the carryall. Then he made up his mind. He was a fully-trusted employe of the Interstate Aero Company, and pretty nearly at liberty to do as he

pleased. Dave looked up at the sky, made some mental calculations, and said finally:

"Tell her who I am, Hiram—I want to have a little talk with her."

"This is my best friend, Dave Dashaway, Miss——"

"My name is Amy Winston," spoke the girl, a trifle shy and embarrassed.

"Hiram Dobbs has told me about your trouble, Miss Winston," said Dave. "He is a fine fellow and feels sorry for you, and so do I. We are going to try and get you to your home within the next three hours."

"Oh, if you only could!" exclaimed the young girl, anxiously. "But there is no train until this evening."

"That is true," replied Dave.

"You see, Dave is a great aviator, Miss," broke in Hiram, in his usual impulsive, explosive way. "He's taken lots of prizes. He won the——"

"That will do, Hiram," laughed Dave. "The truth is, Miss Winston," he continued to the puzzled girl, "we have only one way of getting you to your home. Please step down and I will show you what it is."

Dave helped the girl down the steps at the rear of the vehicle. He led her to the gates of the enclosure and drew one of them wide open.

"Why, it is an airship!" exclaimed Amy Winston. "I saw it yesterday from the seminary grounds."

"Dave was running it, and I was aboard," boasted Hiram, proudly.

"How beautifully it sailed," murmured the girl.

"Miss Winston," spoke Dave, "I can make Easton in about three hours in that machine. It may be something I should not propose, considering the possible risk, but the *Gossamer* is at your service."

"Oh," exclaimed Amy, her eyes filling with tears of gratitude and hope, "I would dare any danger to once more see my dear mother before she dies."

"You are willing to try it?" asked Dave, definitely.

Amy was trembling, but she answered bravely in the affirmative.

"Tell Mr. Grimshaw," said Dave to his friend, who at once started off to obey the order. "Now, Miss Winston," continued the young aviator, "I will help you to a seat in the machine."

When the girl had been disposed of in the most comfortable seat in the *Gossamer,* Dave gave her a strap to draw her dress skirt tightly about her feet. Other straps bound her in the seat so that by no possibility could she fall or be thrown out.

The girl had grown a shade paler and was all

in a flutter, but she did not show the least inclination to draw back from an exploit that would start most people into hysterics.

Dave went into the tent where he and Hiram and Grimshaw ate and slept, and came out in aviation garb. He took some time looking over a guide book. Meanwhile his two helpers had been working about the *Gossamer,* getting everything in order.

Grimshaw made no comment on the occasion. While he always resented any intrusion of outsiders at aerodrome or meet, he had long since made up his mind that Dave knew his business and was just about right in everything he did. The old expert went over the *Gossamer* as thoroughly as if the machine was bound on a long distance non-stop flight. He saw to it that nothing was lacking that an air navigator might need. He even set the green lantern on the right side and the red to the left, steamship code, in case of some delay or accident, whereby the *Gossamer* might drift up against night work.

"Look out for a change in the wind," was Grimshaw's parting injunction.

"It looks like a coming squall in the northwest," replied Dave; "but I think this head wind will hold till we get out of range. All ready, Miss Winston?"

"Yes, sir," fluttered the little lady, holding

tightly to the arms of her seat behind the operator's post, although she was securely tied in.

"All free," said Dave simply, and his helpers stood aside as the self-starter was set in motion.

The *Gossamer* rose lightly as a bird. Just above the fence line, however, Dave slightly turned his head at an unusual sound. He had just a glimpse of two figures acting rather wildly immediately beyond the enclosure.

One was the foppish fellow who had recently been repulsed by Grimshaw, and who had made the strange threat that he would bring somebody with him who would settle affairs.

Apparently this vaunted individual was now in his company. He was a richly dressed lad, somewhat older than Dave. He seemed to be a good deal excited about something; acted, as Grimshaw had described it, as if he owned the world.

His companion was waving his cane angrily as the airship shot skyward. The boy himself shook his fists toward the *Gossamer,* and shouted out furiously some command or threat the young aviator could not make out.

Dave wondered what this second visit meant. He had no time nor thought to spare, either staring or guessing, however. Eye, hand and brain were centered intently upon his task. Dave for the moment forgot everything, except that he was directing to a safe, steady course a mechanism as

delicate and sensitive as the works of a fine chronometer.

He caught the echo of a low, quick respiration from the girl behind him. The suddenness of the ascent had acted on her as it did on every novice, producing a startled feeling. Then, as the *Gossamer* whirled three hundred feet high, and the swaying, gliding exhilaration of perfect motion followed, a long-drawn breath told of relief and satisfaction.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Winston," called out Dave, venturing a quick glance at his passenger, whose wide-open eyes surveyed the panorama beneath them in speechless wonderment.

"Oh, I am not, indeed," cried Amy Winston. "It is only the strangeness."

"You are perfectly safe," assured the young aviator. "We have made a splendid start. Just think of home—and your mother," he added very gently. "I feel certain that we can make Easton inside of two hours."

"I am so glad; oh, so glad," replied Amy, with grateful tears in her eyes.

Dave was pleased that his course towards Easton took him due southwest. A six-mile breeze was coming from that direction. This was a perfect condition for even, stable progress. Over towards the northwest a bank of ominous

black clouds were coming up, threatening a gale and a deluge of rain. The young pilot of the *Gossamer* planned and hoped to dodge this storm by fast flying.

The southern edge of the big cloud began to cover the sky ahead of Dave. Once or twice there were contrary gusts, and he had to do some skillful engineering to preserve a safe balance. He felt considerably relieved to observe that the *Gossamer* was safely out of range of the real storm center. Some ragged-edge masses thrown out from the main body were, however, scudding ahead of him. There were one or two spatters of rain.

To the far right of him Dave could tell that a momentary tornado was sweeping the tops of the trees. He set the lever to the limit notch, made a long volplane and then a wide circuit to the south.

"I believe we are out of range," Dave told himself, hopefully.

Then, as a sudden and unexpected shock announced the meeting of two powerful forces, he sat motionless and helpless.

The young aviator faced a mishap most dreaded of all that threaten the safety of the expert aeronaut.

The *Gossamer* had struck "a hole in the air!"

CHAPTER III

A NARROW ESCAPE

"WE are lost!" thought Dave Dashaway.

The young aviator was not prone to arrive at senseless conclusions. He had made a practical study of aeronautics, in a way; from the first time the pioneer airman harnessed a gasoline engine to a kite and called it a flying machine, down to the loop-the-loop somersault trick in aviation.

A "hole in the air" to the sky traveler is what a yawning chasm is to a speeding automobile or an unexpected cataract to a hydroplane. It is worse than a "killed" motor or even a threatened "turn turtle." Every part of the machine suddenly goes useless. The heavy mechanism simply drops. In a word, the *Gossamer* had been caught in a dead void caused by two opposing air currents colliding, and shutting the machine into an absolute pocket, or vacuum.

If Dave had remained inert, or had hesitated for a single instant of time, the *Gossamer* would have been doomed. A slender thread of hope

presented itself and he was quick to utilize it to the limit. "Feeling" the air with one cheek, he noticed the tail of the machine give a quick switch. This he at once understood indicated that the master air current was from the north. Dave hoped there was power enough left in the propellers to make a sharp, quick turn. He set the apparatus for the speediest whirl he had ever attempted.

The machine was tipping, dropping steadily. Dave banked to the left at a most critical angle. There was a dizzying spin and then a dive. A great breath of relief swept from Dave's lips as the *Gossamer* righted. The wings caught the violent blast of the gust, and the machine fairly bored its way ahead, true as an arrow, into the teeth of the storm.

A drenching shower shut the aerial wayfarers into a blinding deluge of rain drops. Then their course lightened, and Dave knew that the thinning veil of moisture indicated sunlight beyond it. He shut down speed slightly. The air pressure was fast decreasing as the *Gossamer* emerged from the clouds. Dave gradually worked the head of the machine due southwest once more. The former head wind was regained, and sunny progress offered beyond.

"A close shave," said Dave, to himself, and turned to see how his passenger had taken it.

"I suppose that scared you somewhat, Miss Winston?" he remarked.

Amy's face was pale, and she showed the strain of her startling experience, but she replied:

"I could not be frightened with you. Anybody as kind and thoughtful as you are to a poor girl in distress like myself, could not be anything but brave."

Dave's heart warmed at the compliment. He admired the girl, too. As he thought back, he realized that his nerves had been at a tension where any outcry or movement on the part of his passenger might have upset his self-control, and have prevented the prompt action which had saved the day.

He felt proud and pleased at his success in turning a hard corner. His passenger, too, became more light-hearted as the prospect of soon reaching the side of her invalid mother became more assured. Once or twice as they flew over chicken coops in farm yards there was great excitement beneath them, and she could not help but smile.

"That is Easton," she leaned over finally to say to Dave, as the steeples and factory chimneys of a little town came into view.

The girl pointed out her home a few minutes later, and Dave prepared to make a landing. The *Gossamer* came to earth in the middle of a field

a few hundred yards distant from the house the girl had designated.

Long before Dave had released the ropes that had held his passenger in her seat, people who had viewed the novelty of a real airship came flocking to the spot from all directions. Amy seized the hands of the young aviator, bubbling over with gratitude. She tried to thank him as she wished to, but the words would not come.

"Don't delay, Miss Winston," said Dave. "I know they must be very anxious about you at home."

Dave led his little charge to the fence surrounding the field and helped her over it. Then he returned to the *Gossamer*. He found that the propellers had gone through some strain during his adventure in the storm, and he had some little work to do with chisel, hammer and wrench. While he was thus occupied almost a mob surrounded the airship, curious, gaping and delighted.

A man wearing a big star, and evidently the policeman of the town, made himself very officious keeping the crowd back. He had seen an airship once at a county fair and paraded his knowledge now. He tried industriously to make himself very agreeable to the young aviator. Dave had to laugh secretly to himself as the man pinched his fingers describing to a local newspaper man that this was the "magenta"—meaning magneto;

and that the "carbutter"—meaning the carburetor.

"You must have been reading up on airships," spoke the newspaper man to the policeman, as the latter walked importantly about the craft, now and then sternly calling on some small lad to "git back out th' way."

"I have," came the confident answer. "I know a lot about 'em. Of course I haven't ever sailed in one, but my brother, he's a policeman in Long Island, and once, when I was on a visit to him, he was detailed to go out to a place where they was havin' one of these airypane contests, and keep order. I went with him, and he swore me in as his deputy assistant. I seen a lot of them foreign fellers fly, and I picked up a lot of information."

"I suppose so," murmured the newspaper man, who was new in town, and did not know enough to discount the boasting talk of the officer.

"Yes, indeed!" went on the constable. "Why, once one of them birdmen—they call 'em 'birdmen' you know," he explained as though he knew it all, "once one of 'em run out of gasoline just as he was goin' to start in a prize flight, and if it hadn't been for me he'd never won it."

"How's that?" asked the reporter.

"Why I hustled over to the hangar—that's the French word for a balloon shed," he explained

condescendingly, "I rushed over to the hangar and got him a can of gasoline and he went up as slick as anything and won the prize. He said I helped him a lot, and he gave me a dollar. I didn't want to take it, but he insisted. Oh, I know a lot about airships."

Dave was so busy tightening some of the guy wires that had come loosened at the turn buckle, by reason of the great strain, that he paid little attention to the reporter and the constable for a few minutes.

The young aviator, however, noticed that the officious officer was becoming more and more familiar with the machine, touching the different parts, often calling them by their wrong names, and totally unconscious of his errors. Nor was the reporter any the wiser.

"I don't exactly understand what makes the airship move," confessed the newspaper man to the self-appointed instructor. "Is it——?"

"It's these here perpellers," explained the constable. "They work just like an electric fan, you know."

"I see, but then the blades of an electric fan go around but the fan doesn't sail in the air. Why is that?"

"Well—er—it's because—Oh, here's something I forgot to explain," said the constable quickly, finding himself unexpectedly in deep water.

"I'll tell you about the perpellers later. This here's the radiator," he went on. "It's full of water, just like in the radiator of an automobile, and it keeps the gasoline from boiling over—cools it off you know."

"Indeed," said the reporter, who knew a little about autos. "But I thought the water was to keep the engine from getting overheated."

"Not in an airship," insisted the constable. "In an airyplane the radiator keeps the gasoline cool. I'll jest show you how it works," and, before Dave could stop the man, he had opened a small faucet in the radiator, designed to drain out the water.

Now it happened that Dave had been running his engine very fast, and, in consequence, the water in the radiator—which really did cool the motor and not the gasoline—this water was very hot—in fact some steam was present.

No sooner did the meddlesome constable open the stop-cock that a jet of steam shot out, burning his fingers severely. The man jumped back with an exclamation of pain.

"I—I didn't know it was so hot!" he cried. "This must be a new cooling system he's using on this affair."

"I should say it was more like a *heating* system," remarked the reporter, with a smile he could not conceal.

"Ha! Ha! Shiner got burned!" yelled a small boy who had been ordered away from the craft. "Shiner got burned! Ha! Ha!"

"Make a cup of tea, Shiner!" yelled another lad, "Shiner" evidently being the constable's nickname.

"I'll 'shiner' you if I git holt of you!" he threatened, rushing forward with some of his fingers in his mouth to render the pain less. It was not a very dignified attitude for a guardian of the law.

"I wish you'd shut that stop cock!" cried Dave, who was busy tightening a part that he could not very well leave just then. "Shut that water off, or I'll lose all there is in the radiator, and have to put in more."

"It—it's too hot," objected the constable, his attention drawn from the annoying lads. "I didn't know it was so warm. What system do you use?"

Dave was too annoyed to answer, and the constable, not wishing to burn himself again, held back. Meanwhile water and steam were spurting from the stop cock.

"I'll shut it off," volunteered the reporter, feeling that he was partly to blame for the incident, since he had evinced a curiosity that the constable had tried to gratify.

The newspaper man advanced toward the

radiator, which was now enveloped in steam. Dave saw that he had on no gloves.

"Look out!" cried the young aviator. You'll get a bad burn. That's very hot. Here," he added, "take these pliers, and turn that valve. I'd do it myself only if I let go this wire it will slip and I can't easily get it in place again," and Dave indicated where a pair of pliers lay on the ground.

"I get you," said the reporter with a smile. A moment later he had shut the stop cock and the stream of water and the hissing steam stopped.

"Cricky! but this burns!" exclaimed the constable. "I forgot about the radiator part. Some airships don't have 'em on."

"Why not?" asked the reporter.

"Oh, er—well—you see—say, here's what I was telling you about, the perpellers, they make the ship go. You see you turn them around to start the engine, jest like you crank an auto. I guess I can turn them over, though it's pretty hard. Down on Long Island, where my brother was that time, I helped one of the birdmen lots. You jest do it this way," and he advanced toward the big wooden propeller.

"Here, don't touch that!" cried Dave, but he was too late. The officious constable whirled the wooden blade around. As it happened Dave had turned on the switch in order to make a test, and

had forgotten, until that moment, to turn it off. But when he saw what the man was going to do he realized what would happen. "Let that alone!" he cried, being unable to get out, as he was straddling one of the runners to tighten a wire.

The constable gave the apparatus another turn, and with a rattle and bang, like a slavo of musketry, the motor started.

Now there is considerable power to an airship's propeller—there has to be to make the craft sail. As the blades whirled about they fairly blew the constable back out of the way. His helmet went sailing off, tossed by the terrific wind created and, only that he jumped aside in time he would have been hurt. The airship, too, would have moved off, only Dave had left the drag-brake on. This halted it long enough for the young avitaor to leap out and shut off the switch.

"Say!" the lad cried to the constable, "I've a good notion to——"

"I—I didn't know it would start!" cried the man, finally managing to get on his feet, for he had staggered back so fast that he fell. "I didn't know it would do that. I—I guess I'll go up to the drug store and get something for my burned fingers," and, not stopping to give any more information to the newspaper man, the officer hurried off, amid the laughter of the crowd.

It took Dave half an hour to get the machine as he wanted. He had a pleasant chat with the local reporter, who was immensely interested. Dave got ready to start back for home, when a young fellow about his own age made his way hurriedly through the crowd. Our hero observed his resemblance to his recent passenger. He was excited and eager, and seized Dave's hand with great warmth.

"You are Mr. Dashaway?" he spoke.

"Yes, I am Dave Dashaway," replied the young aviator, pleasantly.

"My sister sent me. Oh, how we want to thank you," and the tears began to fall down the cheeks of the manly young fellow.

"How is your mother?" asked Dave, embarrassed at the growing attention of the listening crowd about them.

"That's it, that's it," exclaimed young Winston, brokenly. "You've saved her, oh, think of it; the doctor says she won't die, now!"

Dave tried to quiet the agitated lad, but the latter would have his say. From his incoherent talk Dave gathered that Mrs. Winston had indeed been near death. The main trouble was that she imagined her daughter Amy had died away from home. The girl's return had quieted the frantic sufferer. She had received Amy in a wild transport of delight. Then she had gone to sleep in

her daughter's arms, happy and quiet, the fever broken; and the doctor had announced that the crisis was past.

The crowd began to get wind of the pretty little story of Dave's heroism. The newspaper man was excitedly taking notes. The policeman looked proud at having something of importance happen in the town of which he was the public guardian, and the crowd began to shout handsome things at Dave.

The young aviator was actually blushing as he started the *Gossamer* again. Cheers of genuine enthusiasm rang out, three times three and many times over, as the machine shot skyward. Then, as Dave caught sight of a little lady waving a handkerchief at him from the front porch of the Winston home, he felt somehow as if a real blessing had been bestowed upon him.

"It's a good deal to be an airman," Dave told himself. "It's a good deal more to be able to do a kind deed and make others happy," he added, so glad that he had been of service to Amy Winston, that he would have been willing to go through the daring adventure all over again.

The skies had cleared in every direction. The machinery of the *Gossamer* worked to a charm on the return trip to Lake Linden. The dial showed a trifle over two hundred miles in five hours and a half.

Dave made a run for the turning bar in one corner of the enclosure to get the stiffness out of his limbs. Then he hurried over to the living tent, glad that he had an interesting story to tell to his fellow airmen.

"Nobody here?" he remarked, looking around. "Mr. Grimshaw and Hiram must have gone to town. Probably didn't expect me home so soon."

"Hello, there!" spoke an unexpected voice.

Dave turned quickly. Two persons had passed the gates and were approaching him. He recognized them at once. One was the foppishly-dressed man he had seen twice before. The other was the boy who had shaken his fist at Dave when the *Gossamer* had started on the hasty trip to Easton.

At closer sight than before the young aviator instantly read his visitors as in a book. The elder of the twain was about twenty-five or thirty years of age, and all his elegant attire and rather handsome face did not disguise his resemblance to some shrewd sharper who made his way in the world by living on others.

The boy suggested the spoiled scion of some wealthy family, with plenty of money, and used to spending it foolishly. His face was flushed and excited, and Dave decided that he was under a very baneful influence in the company he kept. He was the first to speak.

"You are Dashaway, I suppose?" he observed in a careless, almost insolent way.

"Yes," said Dave.

"Well, this is my friend, Vernon. Was here before, to-day."

"I know he was," replied Dave.

"Where is the old fellow who was so saucy to him?"

"What do you want to know for?" demanded Dave, unable to keep from getting a trifle angry.

"Because he's due for a trimming, that's why. I don't allow my friends to be treated that way. See here, I don't suppose you know who I am," observed the speaker, with an air of self-assertion that was almost ridiculous.

"I don't," answered Dave.

"I thought so. That may enlighten you."

The boy drew an elegant case from his pocket, selected a card with a tissue paper cover, and handed it to Dave, who took it, somewhat curious to know the personality of so presumptuous an individual. The card read: "*Elmer Brackett.*"

The name Brackett was suggestive to Dave, but not altogether enlightening. There was a Mr. Brackett who was president of the Interstate Aero Company. Dave read the card over twice, closely and thoughtfully, then he looked his visitor squarely in the face.

"Well?" he demanded, coolly.

"My name is Brackett, as you probably observe," remarked the boy, smartly.

"I see it is."

"You don't seem to understand yet," proceeded the forward youth. "My father is the owner of the company that hires you."

"Well?" again challenged Dave.

"You've heard of him, I reckon."

"Many times," replied Dave.

Young Brackett looked nettled. Apparently he had expected Dave to bow with reverence or quake with fear.

"See here," he spoke suddenly in a harsh, rasping tone. "I'm Elmer Brackett, my governor owns that airship and everything around here. I'm his son, and I want to give my friend Vernon a spin in the air."

"Well," said Dave simply, "you can't do it."

CHAPTER IV

IN BAD COMPANY

"WHAT'S that?" shouted young Brackett.

He made a spring forward as if he hoped to intimidate Dave. The young aviator did not budge an inch, and his adversary contented himself with simply glaring at him.

"You heard me," said Dave, simply.

"Yes," fired up the fellow named Vernon; "we heard you, and if I was in Brackett's place you wouldn't be heard much longer. Say, Elmer, why don't you wire your father and get some kind of an accommodating crowd around here."

"I'd soon show who was boss if I was near the old man," grumbled young Brackett.

"I am boss here, if that is what you want to call it," said Dave. "This is private property, I am in charge, and you are trespassers. Outside of your not coming at me in the right way, I want to say to you that the *Gossamer* is here for a specific purpose, and I have my orders and plans."

"If my father was here, he'd soon order you

to give us a spin in the *Gossamer*," declared Brackett.

"I know who your father is, and respect him greatly," replied Dave, "but I would have to have his written order to do any work outside of routine."

"Oh, is that so!" sneered Brackett. "You seem to make no bones about gallivanting about in the *Gossamer* as freely as you choose with your own particular lady friends."

Dave made no reply. He did not consider that his visitors had the fineness of mind to understand the pathetic circumstances of his efforts in behalf of the Winston family.

Vernon gave his companion a wink and a nudge. He whispered some quick words to him that Dave did not catch. Young Brackett drew out a wallet stuffed full of money.

"See here, Dashaway," he spoke, in a tone meant to be friendly and wheedling; "be a good fellow. There are some girls down at the hotel I promised to show the *Gossamer* to, and what she could do on the water. I'll make it a twenty. Come, help us out."

"I am sorry," replied Dave, steadily.

"You won't do it?"

"No."

Again Vernon whispered to his companion. The latter nodded his head. Vernon shot a quick

glance about the enclosure. Then, before Dave could surmise his purpose, the man made a spring at him.

The young aviator was athletic and strong, but he had to cope with a full grown man. Vernon had seized his arms from behind and Dave struggled in vain.

"Fetch those ropes over near the airship," directed Vernon, with an unpleasant laugh. "I'll show you how to do this thing."

Young Brackett looked a trifle frightened.

"See here, Vernon," he said, "I don't know about this."

"Well, I do," retorted Vernon, securely twisting the rope about Dave's arms and body. "You said you knew how to run the machine, didn't you?"

"Why, I've been up in a biplane at the works several times," said Brackett, rather hesitatingly.

"What are you afraid of, then? Just because it's a bigger machine? Look here, give it a try."

"What are you going to do with Dashaway?"

"Take him along."

"What!"

"Certainly, so if we make any blunders he'll have to take the helm to help himself out of the fix."

"I want to warn you," cried Dave. "You are trying a dangerous experiment."

Vernon only laughed. Brackett put on a braggart air of over-confidence. The former lifted Dave into one of the seats and took his own behind the pilot post.

"All right," announced Brackett, climbing into the forward seat. "I think I can manage the machine."

Dave cast a hopeless look towards the gates of the enclosure. There was no sign of Grimshaw or Hiram. He watched the bungling of Brackett over the delicate mechanism, fearful as to the outcome of the resolution of the reckless fellow.

"Self-starter, eh?" he heard the presumptuous pilot say. "I know how to operate that. What's this little mirror for? Oh, yes, to index the curves. Pshaw! I can't go wrong if I watch that."

"Can't you? Oh, my!" muttered Dave.

Young Brackett was all right at the wheel. His brief biplane experience counted for enough to enable him to make a very pretty swoop aloft. He was so delighted at this that he chuckled:

"Say, I guess I'll take a job at running the governor's machine myself. Hey, what?"

"Good for you—doing finely," commended Vernon. "Get over the lake, Brackett. If you can manage to sail the machine we'll take the girls for a ride."

Dave held his breath. Brackett had split half

a circle abruptly, and the *Gossamer* got ready for a dive. By some accident the frightened pilot banked just in time to save a spill.

"Don't change your course—don't dare to!" fairly shouted the excited Dave, as he saw that any further attempt at a head change in novice hands meant sure destruction for the *Gossamer*.

Young Brackett was terribly frightened. In his fear and dismay he turned on the full power, but let the machine run a perfectly straight course. It was, however, on an angle of about fifty degrees.

"What's he to do?" chattered Vernon, himself growing pale and nerveless.

"I can't tell—I can only show him. If the course is not changed, the machine will hit the earth going forty miles an hour," declared Dave.

"Show him, then! show him!" gasped Vernon.

He reached over with trembling hands and began to loosen the ropes with which he had bound the young aviator. In some way they had become tangled, and in that circumscribed space he dared not move about freely. The *Gossamer* tipped slightly, and its dismayed pilot let out a yell of fear.

While Vernon was tugging breathlessly at the ropes, Dave noted that the machine was due to land with a terrific shock inside of two minutes. It just grazed the tops of some tall trees. Then

it missed a flagpole in the center of some private grounds.

"Shut off the power, or we are lost!" cried Dave.

Brackett had just enough sense left to obey him, but that did not prevent a catastrophe. They were just passing near some glass-covered hothouses. The first one they skidded. At the second one the head of the machine ripped the top row of glasses out of place like a toboggan shoe splintering a stretch of thin ice. Then the under floats tangled in the frame work, and Dave bore company with the others in a dive into a bed of geraniums.

The shock of even that soft landing place was sufficient to half stun our hero for the moment. In a dim blur of vision he seemed to see two figures limping away. He caught sight of the machine lying half-way through a frail trellis. Then he heard these startled words in an unfamiliar voice:

"Hello! I say, what's this?"

Dave looked up to see a man in gardener's garb staring in turn at himself, the *Gossamer,* and the havoc the machine had made.

"If you'll help me up," said Dave, rather faintly; "I'll try to explain."

"You'll have to!" cried the gardener. "Who ever heard of such a thing? Get up, but don't

you try to run away from all the mischief you've done."

"Hardly," promised Dave, as the man cut the ropes securing him. "How badly is the machine damaged?"

"How badly are my greenhouses damaged, you'd better say!" shouted the man. "Say, who's to pay for all this wreck and ruin?"

"Don't worry about that," replied Dave. "The company will settle with you."

"I don't know anything about your company," retorted the man. "If you're Dashaway——"

"I am."

"I've heard of you, and you look like a decent, honest fellow. But say, this is an awful fix for me. I'm only in charge here, and I don't know but the boss will hold me responsible for what's happened and take the damage out of my small pay."

"I will see that he doesn't do that," pledged Dave.

The man was almost crying in his fright and distress.

"You estimate what it will cost to replace things as they were," directed Dave, "and I'll settle it right out of my own pocket before I even leave here."

"You will?" cried the gardener, joyfully.

"You can depend upon it. Did you see any-

thing of two fellows who were in the machine with me?"

"Yes, I saw two young men running for that back fence yonder. They got out of sight pretty quick."

"I'm glad they weren't hurt, anyway," thought Dave.

The gardener went around, surveying the damage done to the greenhouses, while Dave examined the *Gossamer*. Our hero was agreeably surprised to find that outside of the warping of one of the wings and a twisted propeller, the machine had suffered very slight injury.

"A lucky escape," he said to himself. "Those venturesome fellows were never nearer death than fifteen minutes ago.

"I say, what's this, Dashaway!"

It was Grimshaw who spoke, pale and out of breath. Equally startled and anxious, Hiram Dobbs, following him, came rushing up to the spot.

CHAPTER V

"THE RIGHT KIND"

"OH, say, Dave, what's happened, anyway?" burst out the irrepressible Hiram.

"You see," observed Dave, with a sweeping wave of his hand.

"Yes, I see," said Grimshaw. "But you never ran the *Gossamer* into all this!"

"No, I wasn't the pilot on this occasion," admitted Dave.

"I told you so!" cried Hiram, jubilantly. "When we first saw the airship and its queer doings, and ran after it, didn't I tell you that Dave couldn't be at the wheel, Mr. Grimshaw?"

"You did, and I felt sure he wasn't," commented Grimshaw. "Who was?" he challenged, bluntly.

"That's quite a story," explained Dave.

"Then tell it."

"I don't want much said about it for the present," stipulated the young aviator.

"All right," nodded Grimshaw.

Dave motioned his friends out of earshot of the gardener, who was pottering about his broken panes. Then he told the whole story.

"Why, the wretches!" growled old Grimshaw, fiercely, when the narrative was concluded.

"The mean sneaks!" exclaimed the indignant Hiram. "Left you here in that fix, not knowing whether you were dead or alive."

"I'd have those two rascals locked up, double-quick," advised Grimshaw.

"No," dissented Dave.

"Why not?"

"I want to think things over a bit, before I decide on what I shall do," was the reply. "I have no patience with the fellow called Vernon."

"'Take my word for it, he's a bad one," declared Grimshaw.

"The other one—young Brackett—I feel sorry for."

"Of course you do," observed Grimshaw, rather sarcastically; "that's your usual way. Who's going to pay for the damage here? Say, you take my advice—teach those two smart Alecks a lesson by having them arrested, and send the bill to Mr. Brackett, telling him all the circumstances."

"I'd a good deal rather help young Brackett than harm him," said Dave, considerately. "He doesn't strike me as a bad fellow at heart. It's

the influence of Vernon that is leading him into trouble."

"How's the machine?"

"Not in very bad shape. I think there are enough tools and materials aboard to mend her up till we get home."

All three of them looked the *Gossamer* over critically. Expert that he was, old Grimshaw soon had the machine free of the trellis and the injured parts repaired. Dave went over to the gardener, who was figuring on the side of a fence post with a piece of chalk.

"Well, my friend," he said cheerily; "what's the damage?"

"Why, you're acting so handsomely about it, I want to make the bill as reasonable as I can," was the reply.

"Of course you do—that's the right way."

"The frames aren't much broken," explained the man. "About all there is to do is to replace the glass."

"Yes, but there's a heap of it," said Dave.

"We buy the panes by the gross. I'm willing to do the setting and puttying myself. I think twenty dollars will cover everything."

Dave took out his pocket book, selected some bank bills, and handed them to the man. He heard an ominous growl from old Grimshaw behind him, and caught a "S't! S't! S't!" from the

exasperated Hiram. Dave, however, had his own ideas as to disposing of the matter in hand.

"If you find it's more, you know where to see me," said Dave to the gardener.

"Say, you're an easy one," observed Grimshaw, with a look of disgust on his face.

"It's a shame to let those vandals go scot free," scolded Hiram.

"I'm glad the *Gossamer* didn't get smashed up, as I feared," was all the young aviator would reply.

Dave made pretty sure that the machine would stand a trip back to the enclosure. To his satisfaction he made the flight without any mishap. Looking the craft over more critically after the return, however, he decided that the wings and floats would need some expert attention before he could venture any extended flight.

It was dark by the time they got the airship housed and supper ready in the living tent. After the meal Hiram strolled away, saying he would go to town after the evening mail. Dave and Grimshaw went inside the tent as a shower came up. They chatted agreeably, watching the gentle rain in the glint of the tent light.

"Hello," said the old man, bending his ear sharply.

"Yes," nodded Dave, "some one is knocking at the gate."

"I'll go and see who it is."

"Maybe it's Hiram."

"No, he's got a key."

Grimshaw went away. Dave heard him talking with someone outside the gate. He was a little surprised as his old friend secured the gate after him. He was further puzzled to note the expression on Grimshaw's face as he came back into the tent.

"Who was it, Mr. Grimshaw?" questioned Dave.

"Humph! he didn't get in. Now see here, you take my advice and don't run into another trap."

"Another trap?"

"That's what I said. There's a fellow out there that wants to see you. He's mighty meek and humble, but from what you told me I guess pretty straight that he's the chap who tried to run the *Gossamer* this afternoon."

"Is he alone?" asked Dave, rising quickly from the camp stool.

"Yes, he's alone. If the bigger fellow had been with him I'd have licked him."

"And he wants to see me?" questioned Dave.

"Mealy mouthed and subdued, just that."

"Why didn't you invite him in?"

"Why didn't I? Say, Dave Dashaway!" stormed the old man, "I believe in forgiving dispositions, but drat me if I'd quite let a trouble-

maker like that young Brackett get a second chance to mix things up."

"I hardly think he means any harm this time," said Dave, and hurried to the gate.

Outside, a patch of sticking plaster over one eye and one arm in a sling, and looking rather mean and ashamed, young Brackett dropped his glance as Dave appeared.

"Come in, won't you?" invited the young aviator, quite heartily.

"No, I don't think I'd better," replied his visitor, in a low tone. "See here, Dashaway, I've got my senses back, and I don't want you or anybody else to think I'm some cheap cad."

"Certainly not," responded Dave. "What's the trouble?"

"I've come to give you this money," explained Brackett, extending his hand. "As soon as I got enough over being scared to feel ashamed of myself, I slipped away from that confounded Vernon. He's always getting me into trouble."

"What do you run with him for, then?" questioned Dave, gently. "See here," he added, placing his hand in a friendly way on the boy's shoulder; "you may be headstrong and foolish at times, but that man doesn't belong in your class."

"You're just right," began Bracket, in a spirited way, and then, as if he feared to go far-

ther into the subject, he added in a moody, dissatisfied tone: "Never mind about that. I've come to pay you back the twenty dollars you gave to the man down at the greenhouses. I went to pay him myself, but you had gotten ahead of me. I can't let you stand for one cent of damage I did, and if there's any other expense——"

"None at all," Dave hastened to say. "See here, you've shown me you are the right sort. I don't like that man Vernon, and down at heart I don't think you do, either."

"It don't matter whether I do or not," muttered the boy. "I don't dare to break away from him till—well till—I feel I'm safe out of his clutches."

"If you are in any foolish trouble—" began Dave.

"I won't discuss it," declared young Brackett, quite stormily. "Take the money, and—see here, Dashaway, I'll give worlds to keep this from the old man."

"You mean your father?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you say so, then," upbraided Dave.

Young Brackett bit his lip.

"I'll try to after this," he promised, quite humbly. "That's all," he added, as Dave took the bank notes.

"I do wish you'd make a friend of me and let me help you out, if it will do any good," said Dave, wistfully.

Brackett dropped his head. Then he gave it a savage jerk.

"You're all right, Dashaway," he said, "but I've got to pay for my fast sledding, and I'll do it like a man."

"Come and see me again," invited Dave.

"Hardly," responded Brackett. "Our paths probably won't cross again—and you're probably the gainer for it."

"I don't know that," declared Dave. "Rest easy on one score—I shall not say anything to your father about to-day's scrape."

"Thank you, Dashaway."

"But I wish you would tell him. Come, now—he's your best friend. If you've been a little wild, go to him and tell him about it."

"A little wild!" repeated Brackett. Then he gave a bitter laugh, waved his hand at Dave, and disappeared in the darkness.

"Poor fellow!" said Dave, thoughtfully. "I'm afraid, as he hinted, he is in the clutches of that sharper, Vernon. I wish I knew a way to help him out."

Dave re-entered the enclosure a good deal subdued. Young Brackett had said hat their paths might never cross again. Dave hoped if

they ever did cross his late visitor would be in a better frame of mind.

Their paths were to cross, indeed, although neither of them realized it at that moment. Dave Dashaway was to hear of him again very soon, and in a truly remarkable way.

CHAPTER VI

A MYSTERIOUS FLASH

"WELL, what did he want?" challenged Grimshaw, gruffly, as the young aviator entered the living tent.

"It was young Brackett," said Dave. "He came to settle the damage up at the greenhouses."

"With real money?"

"Oh, yes."

"You surprise me," observed the old man, drily.

"Don't be too hard on him, Mr. Grimshaw," said Dave. "There is some good in him."

"Humph! It's all under the surface, then. You are too soft-hearted, Dashaway. It's of a piece with that Jerry Dawson affair. After he and his crowd had done you all kinds of harm, stolen the *Drifter* and tried to put you out of business, you let him go scot free."

"Hoping Jerry had learned his lesson and would behave himself."

"Which he won't," affirmed the old man,

strenuously. "I'll wager he'll pop up in some mean way before you get through with this giant airship scheme."

"There's Hiram," announced Dave, brightly, as the gate slammed and a cheery whistle echoed through the enclosure.

Dave's loyal young assistant came into the tent flushed and animated from a run in the rain.

"Any mail?" inquired Dave.

"Yes, a letter and a telegram," replied Hiram, handing two envelopes to Dave.

The young aviator opened the telegram first. He looked at its enclosure so long and steadily that his two friends began to regard him with deep curiosity.

"Well, that's queer," said Dave at length

"What is?" challenged Hiram.

"This message."

"Who is it from?"

"The Interstate people."

"What does it say?" asked Hiram.

"I'll read it: "'Good advertising—keep it up.'"

"H'm," observed Grimshaw. "That's sort of puzzling. Now, what does it mean?"

Dave shook his head vaguely.

"I really don't know," he admitted.

Hiram began to grin. Then he laughed outright.

"Do you?" demanded Dave, glancing suspiciously at his friend.

Hiram slapped his knee emphatically, chuckling the while. He began feeling in the outside pockets of his coat.

"I didn't know at first," he spoke; "but I think I can guess it out now."

Hiram drew out a folded newspaper, opened it up, glanced over it, and refolded it so as to show a half-column article with a display head.

"City evening paper, that just came down with the mail," he explained. "Look at that, Dave Dashaway, and say you aren't famous!"

Our hero was a good deal surprised to find in the newspaper a glowing article about the unselfish heroism of a rising young aviator, who had encountered vivid danger in doing a noble service for a poor girl.

Dave saw at once that the enterprising newspaper man at Easton had made a fine story of the sensational episode. The *Gossamer* was lauded for its handsome conduct in a storm, and the Interstate Aero Company was commended for building such a staunch aircraft. Dave was given full justice, and the interesting little story was told in a very pathetic way.

"You understand now, I reckon, Dave?" chuckled Hiram.

"Why, in a way, yes."

"I suppose the story has been telegraphed all over the country," said Hiram. "It's a good one. The Interstate people saw it, and wired you at once."

Old Grimshaw read the newspaper article eagerly in his turn. He gloated over the handsome things said about Dave.

"I'm proud of you, as usual, Dashaway," he observed.

Dave opened the letter Hiram had brought him. He read it through with a face indicating considerable satisfaction.

"Here's a pleasant bit of news," he announced to his two friends.

"From Mr. King, isn't it?" inquired Hiram. "I noticed the handwriting and the postmark."

"Yes," replied Dave.

"Anything interesting about the giant airship?"

"A whole lot," answered Dave, briskly. "It seems that Mr. Dale has been fortunate enough to find a French aero man who spent several years in foreign dirigible service. Mr. King writes that he is something of an inventor and a practical man in airship construction."

"That's famous, Dashaway," voted Grimshaw, with enthusiasm.

"They are going to push the big craft towards completion just as fast as they can," reported

Dave. "Mr. King writes that they need me and that he is financing the project on my account. He wants me to get the Interstate people to release us, and all of us get to Croydon soon as we can."

"Then the trip across the Atlantic is a sure thing!" cried the excited Hiram.

"Mr. King thinks so."

"Hurrah!" shouted the delighted lad.

"I hope they count me in," spoke Grimshaw, a flicker of the old professional fire and ardor in his eyes. "Since I got knocked out of service by my bad fall from a biplane, I've been pretty well shelved. I'd like to figure in the biggest aero exploit ever attempted, though."

"You are going to, if the rest of us do," said Dave. "Mr. King settled that in my last talk with him."

"He did?"

"Yes. He says you understand a dirigible better than he does a monoplane."

"I'm pretty well posted on balloons, yes," asserted the veteran aeronaut, with a look of considerable pride.

There was little else talked of by the friends but the giant airship the rest of that evening. Dave, later, devoted an hour to writing a long letter to the Interstate people. He told them that Mr. King needed him, and hoped they could find

it convenient to release him without delay from his contract.

Like the real business boy and faithful employe that he was, however, Dave went through regular routine duty the next day. The agent of the company brought down his clients that afternoon, and Dave showed off the *Gossamer* at her best paces.

The ensuing day and the one next following he made the regular ascents for the resort people.

The expected reply to Dave's letter finally arrived. The Interstate people wrote that they were sorry to lose so valued an employe, and added a pleasant word concerning Grimshaw and Hiram. They hoped that the giant airship exploit would be a great success, and announced that at any time a good position for Dave was open with them.

A liberal check was enclosed in the letter, and the statement made that a man to take charge of the *Gossamer* would leave the works for Lake Linden the next day.

Dave looked around for young Brackett whenever he strolled about the lake resort and the village. He did not, however, come across either the youth or the man Vernon. He made some inquiries, and was troubled to learn that the pair had gotten into a fight at the town hotel, had smashed up some furniture, and had left the place with a pretty bad record.

Dave gave a day to his successor, teaching him the ropes. Monday afternoon he had everything packed up ready to take the train for Croydon, where the giant airship was under construction. Hiram, who had been earning very good wages of late, had ordered a new suit of clothes in the village. It would not be done until the next morning.

"You go ahead, Dashaway," advised Grimshaw. "There's nothing to keep you here, and Mr. King seems to need you. Hiram and I will come on to-morrow."

This arrangement was agreed on. Dave took the train, and reached Croydon about dusk. He found it to be a busy little manufacturing city near the coast. From what Mr. King had written him, and through some inquiries, Dave was soon on his way to the so-called aerodrome, where the giant airship was being built.

An old roofless molding shop had been utilized for the construction. It looked lonely and deserted as Dave came up to it. The windows were boarded up, apparently to keep out prying eyes. The big front doors were closely padlocked, and a temporary canvas roof was in place.

The street lamps of the city ran out to the factory, and nearby were some houses. Dave felt sure that Mr. King and the others had taken living quarters in the vicinity. He had no doubt

that a little inquiry would result in locating them.

Dave walked around the old plant, thinking a good deal of the proud hopes that attached to the big airship inside. The upper pair of windows of the place were not boarded up. Dave's eyes chanced to be scanning these as he was about to cross the street to where the houses were.

"Hello!" he cried out sharply, in a startled way.

A sudden flash, bright and dazzling, shot across the whole row of windows from the interior of the building. It resembled the illumination made by a sudden powder blast, but there was no report.

"Why, what can that be?" exclaimed the bewildered young aviator.

Dave bent his ear and listened. No sound broke the stillness. He could not figure out the circumstances for the moment. He was puzzled, and yet reluctant to leave the spot without learning what the mysterious flash portended.

"Someone!" spoke Dave, suddenly.

Then he broke into a run. Mystery had become suspicion. Against the light of a corner lamp, he saw, away down the length of the building, the outlines of a ladder. Its top rested on the sill of one of the upper windows.

The window was open. Through the aperture a form had quickly scrambled. Dave felt sure that some underhand work was in progress.

"Hey, there; who are you? What are you up to?" he shouted.

As he challenged, Dave ran towards the ladder. The person descending it hurried his progress, leaped from it, cast a hurried look at the approaching youth, and darted across the street.

Our hero noticed that he held in one hand a small black case about ten inches square.

As the fugitive turned the street corner he looked again to see how closely he was being pursued. The lamp light fell full upon his face.

"The mischief!" fairly shouted the amazed young aviator. "It's Jerry Dawson!"

CHAPTER VII

AT THE AERODROME

DAVE DASHAWAY was greatly startled. All along the line of his airship experience Jerry Dawson had crossed his path, always in a threatening and troublesome way. A quick thinker, the young aviator traced a new menace in this unexpected appearance of the scampish plotter.

"It certainly means no good for either my friends or myself," reflected our hero. "What mischief has he been up to inside the aerodrome? That flash meant something. What?"

Dave ran on for a bit, but soon discovered that he was wasting time in striving to overtake the fugitive. Jerry had made good his escape among the scattered buildings beyond the street corner where he had disappeared from view.

Dave hurried to the house nearest to the aerodrome. He ran up its steps and knocked briskly at its door. A woman appeared in response to the summons.

"I am looking for the people working in the

old factory over yonder," explained Dave, hurriedly.

"Oh, yes, the balloon folks, you mean? They board at my sister's house."

"And where is that?"

"Second house from the next corner. Number twenty-seven."

"Thank you," said Dave and was off like a flash. "Oh, Mr. King!" he called out a moment later, as he recognized the well-known figure of the veteran airman crossing the street just ahead of him.

"Why, Dashaway!" exclaimed Mr. King, in a hearty way. "We've been expecting you, and I'm glad you've come. Grimshaw and Hiram——"

"I'll tell you later," interrupted Dave, rather unceremoniously. "Mr. King, get right over to the aerodrome. Something's up."

"Why, what do you mean, Dashaway?"

"Mischief is brewing, if I'm not mistaken."

"Mischief? In what way?"

The young airman lost no time in briefly recounting his discovery. He had Mr. King as thoroughly stirred up as himself by the time he had concluded his graphic recital.

"This is serious," declared Mr. King, very much disturbed. "Dawson again, eh? It's easy to guess trouble when that young scapegrace is

around. It fits in with—but that will keep. There is no time to wait. Stay here for a minute."

The expert aviator dashed into the house, while Dave waited in the street. He kept his eye fixed on the aerodrome, half expecting every moment to see it burst into flames.

"Here we are," announced Mr. King, reappearing on a run with two companions. One of them was Mr. Dale, who grasped Dave's hand while hurrying along. The other man Dave had never seen before.

"That is Leblance, our new man," explained Mr. Dale.

"Don't delay!" called out Mr. King, excitedly, leading the way, and the group reached the entrance to the aerodrome in less than two minutes.

Mr. King unlocked the door. As he opened it he reached in and touched the button controlling the electric lights. A blaze of radiance suddenly illuminated the rambling place, making it as bright as day.

In the center of the shop, supported on a working frame and by the iron girders aloft, was the skeleton of the giant airship. The young aviator was eagerly ready for full attention to the object so dear to him. All his faculties, however, were for the instant enlisted in an effort to trace out the significance of the surreptitious visit of Jerry Dawson.

"There does not seem to be anything out of place," said Mr. King, after a swift survey of the dirigible balloon.

"Oh, but I smell powder," observed Leblance, sniffing.

"Powder?" repeated Mr. Dale.

"Yes. There has been some kind of an explosion here," insisted the French engineer looking around.

Dave hurried over to the window where he had first discovered Jerry Dawson. There were a number of tall, slim ladders all about the working framework. He lifted one of these against the sill of the window aloft. Then he ran up its rounds nimbly.

"Aha!" suddenly exclaimed the young aviator.

"Found something, Dashaway?" called out Mr. King.

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

For reply Dave quickly descended the ladder. He held in one hand a sooted tin disc. Its center showed a little heap of hard cinders.

"I found this on the window sill," he explained.

"What is it?" questioned Mr. Dale.

"I think I guess the motive of Jerry Dawson's visit now," said Dave. "The little black box he had under his arm was a camera. This is the flashlight disc."

"Hello!" exclaimed Mr. King, comprehendingly.

"They have been photographing our balloon!" cried Leblance.

"Exactly," asserted the young aviator.

The engineer and Mr. Dale exchanged disturbed looks. Mr. King was thoughtful.

"We might have expected it," he said, but to Dave only.

"How is that?" inquired our hero.

"I'll tell you soon as we reach the house. I am glad they did no harm to the balloon. I hardly think they will try that, Leblance," he said to the Frenchman, "but you had better get one of your men to stay on watch here nights."

"Yes, yes," responded Leblance earnestly. "We have been warned, we must look out."

"Come with me, Dashaway," said Mr. King. "I have a lot to talk over with you."

Mr. Dale remained at the aerodrome until Leblance could hunt up one of his workmen and place him on watchman's duty. The aviator led his young friend to the boarding house. Dave declared that he was not hungry, but his host would not consent to this impending talk until he had dispatched a good meal. Then he took him to his own room, locked the door to secure them from interruption, and made him take a comfortable armchair.

"You have arrived in the nick of time, Dashaway," said Mr. King. "I've felt the need of you for some days."

"I can't be of much assistance until the airship is finished, I should think," suggested the young aviator.

"That is true so far as the *Albatross* is concerned," agreed Mr. King. "That end of the proposition is in capable hands, I am glad to say. We have been very fortunate in securing the services of Leblance. He is an expert in airship construction, helped to build several models in Europe, and has some splendid new ideas. I am now satisfied that the *Albatross* will be all that we have hoped for."

"That is good," said Dave.

"It seems that our project has made quite a stir in the aviation world," proceeded Mr. King. "All the clubs are interested, the central association has taken the matter up, and there is a chance of a bulk prize of at least fifty thousand dollars being offered."

"Grand!" commented Dave, with sparkling eyes. "It's worth trying for, isn't it, Mr. King?"

"And we will get it, if there's no miss in our plans—and no trickery, Dashaway," asserted the veteran airman, confidently. "I have counted all the risks and chances. Given fair conditions, I believe our group will successfully make the first

airship voyage across the Atlantic. To-morrow I will show you how far we have progressed, and how carefully Leblance is planning to turn out the finest dirigible ever constructed. It will make you as hopeful and enthusiastic as myself."

"I'm that already," insisted the young aviator.

"Very good, but I need your services for a certain phase of the proposition that is worrying me."

"What is that, Mr. King?"

"Well, Dashaway," answered the expert airman, "I have reason to believe that we will not be the only contestant in a race across the Atlantic. In fact," continued Mr. King, seriously, "I am quite certain that the rival of the *Albatross* is being built now."

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIVAL AIRSHIP

"A rival in the field?" said the young aviator, with a good deal of interest and curiosity.

"Yes," nodded Mr. King. "It isn't that I didn't expect it. We have no exclusive patent on building an airship and trying to cross the Atlantic. We do want to know what we have to fight against, though."

"Yes, it is always best to find out what your competitors are doing," agreed Dave.

"Well, there are several we have run down and dismissed from our minds. Two-thirds of them are cranks seeking notoriety. Some of the others are inventors who know all about mechanics, but nothing practical concerning aircraft. It would amuse you to go over some of the wild schemes they are getting up. One proposition has kept me busy thinking."

"What is that, Mr. King?"

"You remember a man named Davidson?"

"Why, certainly," responded the young aviator

at once. "He is the fellow they ran out of the Springfield aero meet."

"That's the man," assented Mr. King, "an unscrupulous trickster. He has been tabooed by all legitimate airmen, but he has bobbed up again with his old-time nerve and audacity. Look there."

The aviator selected a bunch of newspaper clippings from a drawer in his desk, and pushed them over to his young friend.

Dave scanned them rapidly. An item hinted mysteriously at a grand exploit in aeronautics about to be undertaken by the "celebrated" airman, Roger Davidson. A later article purported to show the possibility of sailing a dirigible balloon across the Atlantic.

A column story followed. It referred to the great interest in the international exploit, and named the rich prize ready for the successful competitor. It was understood that Roger Davidson was preparing to enter the race, and a superb aircraft was being built for him at an aero plant at Senca.

"I suppose you remember that Jerry Dawson and his father were in the employ of Davidson for a time, Mr. King?" observed Dave.

"I recall it perfectly," nodded the aviator.

"And Jerry being here to-night shows they are together again."

"It looks that way. As long as they only try to steal our thunder I don't so much mind," remarked the airman. "It may be the start for something worse, you see. I am tied up here with Leblance. I want you to ferret out the Davidson crowd and find if they are really up to something."

"I can do that," assured the young aviator, confidently.

"None better, I know. Get their line-up, Dashaway. Find out if they are really in earnest, or only jockeying for notoriety, or fleecing some gullible promoter."

"All right," agreed Dave; and that settled it with Mr. King, who had full confidence in the shrewd wits and fidelity of the boy he had taught to fly.

Dave was to start for Senca the next evening. He passed a glorious morning at the aerodrome. The French inventor was one of the most interesting men he had ever met. Leblance was all business, but very enthusiastic and optimistic in his work. He took a fancy to Dave, and told him things about transatlantic aircraft and airmen that were part of an actual education to the young aspirant for aeronautic honors.

The construction of the *Albatross* had progressed far enough to show a practical form and substance. No expense was being spared. The

men under Leblance were experts in their line, and Dave was amazed at the details they were working out.

"It's money well invested," declared Mr. Dale, "if it only serves to produce the most perfect airship ever built."

"Why, if they put all the things in the *Albatross* they count on," said Dave, "it will be like a trip on a high-class ocean steamship!"

"Wait till she's done, my friend," observed Leblance. "We shall see—and we shall cross the Atlantic; oh, never fear."

Grimshaw and Hiram put in an appearance by noon. The latter went wild over the *Albatross*. He believed implicitly in Dave, and the young aviator believed in the giant airship under construction.

"If they let me go on that trip," said Hiram, breathlessly, "I'll be the proudest and the happiest fellow in the world."

"You are going, if any of us do," promised Mr. King, and the delighted Hiram moved about as if he was treading on air.

Mr. King went down to the train with Dave.

"Don't run into any danger, Dashaway," he advised. "You are going to deal with a wicked-tempered crowd, remember that."

"I shall remember," promised Dave; "and profit by your warning."

Hiram was rather lonesome over the absence of his friend the next day. The ensuing one he got restless and anxious.

"I tell you what," he said, confidently to Grimshaw the next afternoon; "if Dave don't show up soon, I'm going after him."

"Dashaway knows how to take care of himself—trust him for that," insisted the old airman.

"Well, I can't stand this worry. If he don't come by to-morrow, I'm going to look him up."

Grimshaw said nothing to this. He was, in fact, also a trifle disturbed over the prolonged absence of Dave. His grim face relaxed into genuine relief and gladness that evening, as, just after dusk, the young aviator broke in upon the airship group.

Dave was brisk and cheery as usual, and all hands gave him a cordial greeting. Mr. King and Leblance were eager to hear his report at once.

"Well," said Dave, "I've found out about all there is to discover down at Senca."

"Does it amount to anything?" inquired the aviator.

"That's for you and Mr. Leblance to say."

"Run across that fine specimen of humanity, young Dawson?" asked Grimshaw, in a kind of a growl.

"He had been sent to New York for some balloon material," explained Dave, "so I got along finely, for Davidson doesn't know me by sight. Sure enough, they are building a dirigible balloon," continued Dave. "They've found a backer who has put up several thousand dollars. They talk big of how sure they are of reaching Liverpool in a week's time," and Dave smiled.

"What are you smiling at, Dashaway?" inquired Mr. King.

"You would smile if you saw the craft they are building," declared Dave. "To tell you the truth, I can't get away from the suspicion that the whole thing is what people call a fake."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I had no trouble in getting into their workroom. The way they act, the machine they're getting up—well, I almost made up my mind that Davidson is doing all this to get some of the promoter's easy money. If the *Dictator* ever sails a hundred miles, let alone a thousand, it will be doing well."

"What kind of a craft is this *Dictator*?" inquired Leblance, with professional interest.

"I'll show you," said Dave, feeling in his pocket. "The fact is, I gave those fellows tit for tat."

"As how?" questioned the curious Hiram.

"Well, they stole a photograph of the *Al-*

batross. I had the chance to draw a picture of the *Dictator,* and here it is."

The young aviator produced a paper roll from his pocket. Dave was a natural draughtsman. As he spread out the paper a well-traced penciled outline was revealed.

"Let me see it," spoke Leblance, eagerly. "Ah, you have done well."

The keen eyes of the French inventor scanned the drawing intently. Then, suddenly and with great excitement of manner, he threw it upon the table.

"Preposterous!" he exclaimed. "Nonsense! Absurd! My friend King, we have nothing to fear. The *Dictator* is a botch, a farce. Whoever constructed it is a novice, a dabbler! That machine could not fly ten miles!"

CHAPTER IX

IN THE LEAD

"SOMEONE here to see you, Dave."

Hiram greeted the young aviator with this announcement one evening, two weeks after their arrival at Croydon.

"Is that so?" said Dave. "Who was it?"

'I can't say, for he wouldn't tell his name. I was walking along the fence around the aerodrome, and just as I neared the gates he popped out from behind a pile of boards, just as if he had been in hiding."

"Did he ask for me?"

"Yes. I told him you were here quite regularly, and always evenings at the boarding house. The fellow looked peaked and scared, and backed away as soon as he saw someone coming down the street. He mumbled something about finding you."

The young airman could not surmise who his strange visitor might be. He ransacked his mind, wondering if it could be some one of his old friends from his home town. Then he said:

"Describe him to me, Hiram, will you?"

"Why," explained Hiram, "he was a trifle older than I am, and taller; yes, fully two inches taller. Oh, by the way, he wore a false mustache."

"What's that?" challenged Dave, half guessing Hiram was joking. But the narrator looked earnest enough. "You say he wore a false mustache?"

"Sure thing," persisted Hiram.

"How did you know it was false?"

"Because it came partly off just as the boy turned his face away. Say, you couldn't tell much about him. His face and hands were all grimed up, and he had his cap pulled way down over his eyes. It was funny, though, one thing."

"What, Hiram?"

"For all his trampish looks, I noticed that his linen was fine and white, and the necktie he wore was one of those expensive ones you see in good furnishing shops."

"Is that so?" observed Dave, musingly. Then a quick thought came to his mind. He put Hiram through a rapid course of cross-questioning.

"I am satisfied it is young Brackett," said Dave, to himself. "But why in that trim, and acting like a fugitive? Hiram," he added aloud, "keep your eye out for that boy. I am sure he is in some kind of trouble, and wishes to see me very much."

"All right," nodded Hiram, carelessly. "He won't get away from me next time."

"Don't use any force and scare him," directed Dave. "Tell him that I guess who he is, and want to see him very much."

"Very well. There's Professor Leblance just going into the aerodrome. Isn't it famous what he says about the *Albatross* being nearly finished and just as perfect as money and skill could make it."

Both boys hurried their steps to overtake the genial, accommodating Frenchman. For the time being Dave's recent visitor drifted from his mind.

The past two weeks had been the busiest and most engrossing in all the career of the young airman. Dave's report on the Davidson balloon and the drawing of it he had showed to Leblance had convinced the expert that the *Dictator* could not make even a start in the race across the Atlantic.

Dave had told him the gas bag of the *Dictator* was conspicuously made of tri-colored fabric. Its promoter, Davidson, had made a great claim. The propelling power of the *Dictator,* he declared, would be built on the monoplane principle. When traveling the gas bag would collapse, except when they wanted to float. A gas-generating machine was among the adjuncts of the hull, and was

placed just above the framework attaching the airplanes to the balloon.

"It is nonsense, ridiculous," insisted Leblance, over and over again. "They are inviting sure death if they venture a hundred miles away from land."

"All the same, they are going to try it," proclaimed Hiram, a week later, holding up a newspaper. "Here is a great account of the machine and the plans, and Davidson and Jerry Dawson, who are going to fly the *Dictator*."

These two latter individuals did not trouble the *Albatross* people any further. A constant guard, however, was kept on duty in the aerodrome. There were a great many curious and interested visitors. Day by day the giant airship approached completion. Now, as Hiram had announced, it was practically ready to essay its initial flight.

Professor Leblance smiled indulgently at them, as with considerable professional pride he walked around the mammoth structure his skill and efficiency had devised. Dave never tired of surveying the splendid machine. To him it was a marvel how Leblance had assembled the parts of the airship so speedily. There were three engines, and from the wooden ribs and metal bracing, socketed to withstand collisions, to the passenger cabin almost as sumptuously furnished as a Pullman

palace car, every detail fitted into a mammoth scheme never before attempted in aeronautics.

"The *Albatross* will do what no aeroplane could accomplish," said Leblance to his companions, who were admiringly regarding the great machine.

"What is that, Mr. Leblance?" inquired the young aviator.

"It can be perfectly handled in a storm exceeding thirty-five miles an hour velocity. It is as much of a ship as any that can travel the ocean. An iron ship is sustained on the water by the air inside of her hull, air being eight hundred times lighter than water. The *Albatross* will be sustained in the air by hydrogen gas, which is sixteen times lighter than air."

"And sixteen to one is as good as unlimited to one," remarked Dave, who had been studying aeronautics.

"That's it. The *Albatross* is a ship sustained by displacing more than its own weight on the air. Its gas chambers are inflated to about three-fourths of their capacity, to allow for the full expansion of gas after the ship has been driven up dynamically by the action of the engines and propellers, the flat top and under surface of the hull acting as an aeroplane."

The *Albatross* was a flexible gas bag, just like the ordinary drifting balloon, except that in shape

it was long and pointed, instead of round. Otherwise, Leblance explained, it could not be driven through the air. The gas was contained in twenty-two separate chambers inside of the rigid hull, which performed the same functions as the air-tight compartments inside an ocean liner.

"It will sink only if it leaks badly," explained Leblance. "The sustaining compartments are always closed. Even if several compartments should burst, the loss of the lift is compensated by the aeroplane action of the hull whenever driven at full speed. When thus driven it burns its own fuel so rapidly that this, acting the same as the casting of ballast, is continuously lightening the ship. This is what is called balancing the ship. The air balloonets maintain the rigidity of the bag whenever it loses gas through the action of the sun or change in elevation. The breeze passing through the ventilators at the bow prevents the gas from expanding on the hottest days of the year. I tell you confidently, my young friends, to my mind the *Albatross* is practically unsinkable."

Neither Dave nor Hiram had thus far been inside the cabin and other living apartments of the *Albatross*. They had, however, watched their construction. The big airship could carry twenty passengers, if necessary, and in providing for the comfort of those making the first

trip no detail for their walfare had been overlooked. There were washrooms, provision apartments, a cook's galley; and the engineer's quarters, Leblance explained, would be perfect in appointment and equipment. The main point he had striven for was to maintain absolute control of the gas at all times. As this depended upon reliable engines, motors had been built that ran for thirty-six hours at full speed. The machinery could not break down, as every part had been duplicated.

"That means," said Leblance, "that if the carburetor gets out of order, a duplicate enables it to go right on working. The engine has a great number of automatic devices, among them two pumps which force the fuel to exactly the right places, even if the ship is standing on its beam ends, running up into the air or coming down at an angle of forty-five degrees. You won't have to sit sandwiched in small quarters, my young friends. You can walk up and down the cabin and go all over the ship, without disturbing the balance of the huge float overhead. To-morrow the last touch will be put on the engine, and then practically we will be all ready."

Hiram went down to the post-office for the mail after supper that day. Mr. King and his party were downstairs in the living room of the boarding house, entertaining two airmen who had

come to Croydon to look over the *Albatross* that afternoon, when Hiram returned.

The young aviator's impetuous assistant burst unceremoniously in upon the group, stumbled over a rug and went flat, but flushed and breathless tossed the evening newspaper to Mr. King.

"Read, read!" panted the excited lad.

"Why, what's all this commotion, Hiram?" questioned the astonished veteran airman.

"It's all in—the paper," gasped Hiram in jerks. "The *Dictator*—has—got—ahead of us."

"What's that!" fairly shouted Mr. Dale, springing to his feet.

"Yes," declared Hiram. "The *Dictator* started from Senca this afternoon—on her trip across the Atlantic!"

CHAPTER X

THE HAUNTED AERODROME

THE excitable Leblance was on his feet in an instant. Dave reached the side of Mr. King and glanced quickly at the paper he had opened out.

"Impossible—so poorly equipped! Incredible—so quickly!" almost shouted the Frenchman.

"The *Dictator* has sailed, just the same," announced the veteran airman, conclusively. "I'll read it to you."

Every word of the article in the newspaper was taken in absorbedly by the persons in the room. According to it, the *Dictator* had made a splendid ascent from Senca at two o'clock that afternoon. The red, white and blue appearance of the great gas bag had evoked the most patriotic enthusiasm, and cheers and flag-waving had accompanied the flight.

The *Dictator,* according to the report, would float southward overland till a point near Baltimore was reached. Here a descent would be

made to learn it's condition, the machinery carefully scanned, and the ocean course begun. Then followed an interview given out by Davidson on the superiority of his double monoplane apparatus. There was, too, a portrait of Davidson and one of Jerry Dawson. The article wound up with a reference to the *Albatross,* which it stated, would soon be hot on the heels of the *Dictator.*

"They have got the lead," observed Mr. Dale, in an anxious tone, the one of the group most disquieted by the newspaper article.

Professor Leblance shrugged his shoulders. He waved his hand to express ridicule. His long, waxed mustache curled up in disdain.

"It is absurd," he said. "Do I not know? An egg shell like that—no science, no reserve force. Bah! I laugh at it."

All the same the volatile Frenchman beckoned Mr. King to the next room. In low, serious tones they held quite an extended conversation. At its end Leblance hurried from the house. Mr. King returned to his friends with a serious face.

"The ball has been set rolling," he spoke, "there is no doubt of that. No matter what we think or guess about the *Dictator,* it seems certain that the craft has made a start. Leblance has gone to set his men at night work. The *Albatross* must be gotten in trim for its flight within forty-eight hours."

"As quickly as that!" exclaimed Dave.

"Leblance assures me he will have the *Albatross* all ready for its flight by day after to-morrow," said the airman. "Make preparations, my friends. There must be no delay."

"Hurrah!" whispered Hiram, into the ear of his young friend.

The guests of Mr. King saw that his mind was seriously on his business, and arose to depart.

"Some of our crowd will be here to give the *Albatross* the right send-off," one of them declared.

The airman saw the visitors to the door. When he returned he snatched up his hat quickly.

"Come with me, Dashaway; you too, Hiram," he directed.

"Where are you going?" inquired Mr. Dale.

"To the aerodrome. There is going to be a lot of rush work to do, and perhaps we can help."

"Count me in," said the old man, cheerily," although I haven't been very useful so far outside of gaping at the wonderful work of our gifted friend, Leblance."

"Day after to-morrow is the twenty-first," spoke up Grimshaw. "Two days' start for the *Dictator* crowd."

The group left the boarding house. They crossed the street and walked along the fence of the aerodrome enclosure. Dave and Hiram were

in the lead. They were chatting animatedly as they turned the corner of the building, when Dave was thrust violently to one side and Hiram was knocked head over heels to the street.

A frenzied yell accompanied the collision with them of a wild, scurrying form, which recoiled at the unexpected impact, a hat bobbing from its head.

"Hi! what's all this?" challenged the astonished Mr. King.

"Why, it's the night watchman!" declared Grimshaw.

"Oh, Mr. King!" panted the man, and then, pale, shaking, and gasping for breath, he fell against the wall of the building from sheer weakness.

"Here, brace up," ordered the aviator, seizing the arms of the fellow and shaking him. "What's the trouble?"

"Ghost!" choked out the watchman, in thrilling accents.

"Where—what do you mean?"

"Aerodrome."

"A ghost in the aerodrome?" questioned Mr. King, derisively. "Is that what you're trying to say?"

"Yes."

"Nonsense! Here, Grimshaw, help me get this fellow back to his post of duty."

Between them they forced the man along the walk. He gurgled, quaked, and held back as they neared the gates of the enclosure. They found these locked, as also the door to the old factory, when they reached it.

"I locked it in," quavered the frightened watchman. "Don't—don't let it out!"

"You're a fine guardian of property, you are," censured the airman, severely. "Here we are," and as he opened the door, Mr. King snapped on the electric lights. The watchman sank to a chair and crouched as he directed a scared glance around the place.

"Where's your ghost?" derided the aviator quickly.

"I—I don't see him now," grunted the watchman.

"I guess you don't," scoffed Grimshaw. "You must be a weak one to fly into a tantrum like this over nothing."

"Nothing!" fairly bellowed the watchman. "I saw it plain as the nose on my face. See here, I had the door ajar about a foot to let in a little of the cool evening air. Here I sat in my chair right near it. I must have half snoozed and woke up suddenly. Not five feet away, right near that oil tank yonder, was a horrible shape. It was all white and unearthly. As I started up it let out an unearthly scream and waved its arms. Say, it

was curdling! I bolted for the door, locked it, and scooted."

"Yes, you scooted all right," grumbled Hiram, rubbing a bump on his head.

Mr. King, with a glance of impatience at the great booby of a watchman, proceeded briskly the length of the building, peering into every odd nook and corner. When he came back he held in his hand a long cotton sheet that had been used to cover some of the machinery.

"That is what you saw," he declared. "Somebody has been playing a trick on you."

"Why, how could that be," chattered the watchman, "seeing nobody was in the building but me?"

"How do you know that?" demanded the aviator; "when you say you had the door open? I tell you some one slipped in, wrapped in the sheet, and half scared the life out of you."

"Then he must be here now," insisted the watchman, "for when I bolted I locked the door after me."

"It all looks rather queer," remarked Mr. Dale.

"Hi!" suddenly shouted the watchman.

"What's the matter now?" asked Mr. King.

"My dinner pail—that I bring my night lunch in."

"What about it?"

"Gone! It was right here near my chair. It's been taken."

Dave had followed the progress of the incident of the hour with curiosity, ending in positive interest.

"Come on, Hiram," he said.

"What for?" inquired his comrade.

"To do some investigating. Don't you see that if the watchman's story is straight some one really was here?"

"And if the door was locked when the watchman ran away he couldn't very well get out."

"Exactly."

The two lads made more than one tour of the length and breadth of the place. Their quest proved a vain one. There was no one hiding about the aerodrome, as far as they could discover.

"We'll have to give it up," said Hiram at last, "although it's something of a mystery."

It was, indeed, but a mystery soon to be explained in a startling way to the young aviators.

CHAPTER XI

A GRAND SUCCESS

"ALL ready!"

Robert King, seated in the pilot room of the *Albatross,* spoke the words through a tube at his side connecting with the cabin.

Dave Dashaway stood beside him, and behind the young aviator was Hiram Dobbs. It was the most impressive moment in all the boys' lives. Well might it be, for the next movement of the expert airman meant the start of the giant airship on a cruise but once before attempted by mortal man.

Before the skilled sky rider was a great sheet of glass punctured with knobs of metal. Each bore a number. From practice, these indices to guiding detail were as familiar to Mr. King as an alphabet to a schoolboy. The operator was so intent upon his work that his hand trembled, his eyes were glued to the pilot board, and his face was quite pale. Dave stood with every nerve tense and strained. Hiram fairly held his breath.

There was a grind and a sway as Mr. King touched a particular button. The huge gas bag lifted its prow from the ground, then its body cleared all earth of contact, and the next instant was stretched out on an angle of forty-five degrees.

"We're started!" breathed Dave.

"It's grand!" pronounced Hiram, in a gasp.

Both edged towards the open window. A dizzying panorama greeted their sight.

The old factory was a wreck. One entire sidewall and parts of the front and rear walls had been torn out of place that morning, to allow for the exit to level ground of the *Albatross*. Outside of the enclosure over a thousand persons were gathered. A band was playing, the crowd was cheering, and from a neighboring roof a group of reporters and a dozen airmen, friends of Mr. King, joined in the tumult, waving hats, flags and handkerchiefs.

The *Albatross* behaved splendidly. There was not a jar as it ended a mile ascent in exactly five minutes. Then, as the vast machine balanced to its natural position, it began a straight, even glide so graceful and buoyant that it imparted a positive thrill to the passengers.

"Say, it's glorious!" burst out the irrepressible Hiram, "I feel as if I had been taking laughing gas!"

Dave resumed his position near his friend and patron, Mr. King. For the present he was to take no active part in running the *Albatross*. He had, however, sat up half the night listening to the arrangements mapped out by Professor Leblance. He realized, too, that as soon as he learned all that the aviator had acquired he was to relieve him. There was not a movement made by the skilled hand of the airman that Dave did not memorize. He had accompanied the professor in a tour all over the craft two hours before starting, and had been amazed at the simplicity of the construction as a whole. He was lost in admiration as he realized what a perfect mechanism controlled the giant airship.

The Frenchman had four skilled airship men under his orders. They had been trained to their duties in Germany and France. Each knew what was required of him, and each understood that, while they appeared to act as automatons, a single miss in the programme might end their career in mid-air, or in the ocean depths.

Outside of these men, who performed engineering duties solely, a young and enthusiastic Pole named Vacla assisted the professor in the actual control of the craft. In the pilot room Mr. King directed the course of the *Albatross* by electric signals, or word of mouth through the speaking tube.

Passages ran past the cased-in balloonets to every part of the airship. In the direct center of the craft and above the airplanes and float attachments was the roomy cabin. Two persons, both foreigners, the cook and the cabin attendant, had this department in charge. The cabin had rows of windows on both sides, and was furnished comfortably and even elegantly. Seated at one of the windows, a passenger had a perfect view as far as the eye could reach.

Hiram found his way to the cabin, to come upon Mr. Dale and Grimshaw viewing the fast-receding earth. The good hearted old gentleman, who had financed the proposition almost solely on Dave's account, was chuckling, with his fat comfortable face crossed with a great smile of delight. Grimshaw seemed more contented and spirited then Hiram had ever seen him before.

"We've made a famous start," burst out Hiram, waving his hand in glee.

"That's pleasant," beamed Mr. Dale.

"And Mr. King says we're going to keep it up."

"That's natural," joined in Grimshaw.

"Everything has been provided for, and we're going ahead slick as grease."

"That's evident," chuckled Mr. Dale.

"And we're going to cross the Atlantic first!" boasted the excited young airman.

"That's all!" roared Grimshaw—"all worth working for and waiting for. I've dreamed it for ten years. Now—hooray!"

In about half an hour Professor Leblance, Mr. King and Dave came into the cabin. The Frenchman's eyes were shining with half-suppressed excitement and satisfaction. Mr. Dale rushed at him and grasped his hand fervently.

"My friend," he said, "you've proven a genius, a wonder! Hold out as you have begun, and I double the fee originally agreed upon."

"Ah, sir," replied the gifted engineer, "let me but see the land on the other side—then, undying fame! I ask no more."

"See here," broke in the ever-active and restless Hiram, "is this all we've got to do—sit here and let her drift?"

"About that, for the present," returned Mr. King.

"Remember, we are still over land," reminded the professor. "It is calm and fair. It is a pleasant beginning. When we get over the ocean——"

The Frenchman here shrugged his shoulders expressively, as if he thought it no child's play ahead.

"Then," added Mr. King, "every man must do his duty as on a ship in stress of weather."

"The orders are for four hours drifting," ex-

plained Professor Leblance. "About nightfall we will have reached what we call the approximate air current. The right air course is just as established as the ocean roads, and we aim to follow it in our voyage."

"And now, my friends," came from Mr. Dale. "I have something more to say about this wonderful airship."

All eyes were at once turned on the rich gentleman who had made it possible to construct the *Albatross*.

"Years ago Dave Dashaway's father and I were chums. He did me many a good turn. That is why I have taken such an interest in my young friend here. Now that this giant airship is an accomplished fact, I wish to make it known to all of you that I have had it built on his account——"

"Oh, Mr. Dale!" interrupted our hero.

"It is true, my boy, and from this moment on I wish the *Albatross* to be known as Dave Dashaway's airship," went on the rich gentleman.

"Hooray!" cried Hiram and Grimshaw, in unison.

"My airship?" cried Dave.

"Yes, my boy, your airship," answered Mr. Dale. "And may she win her way across the Atlantic without a mishap."

"Amen to that," put in Mr. King. "Dave,

my warmest congratulations," and he held out his hand.

Dave was so overcome he could scarcely speak. But at last he thanked Mr. Dale heartily for his great kindness. The thought that the giant airship had been turned over to him filled his heart with new enthusiasm.

"I'll do my best to make a success of the trip," he said, in a voice filled with emotion.

"I know you will—I bank on you, my boy," answered Mr. Dale.

They circled out toward the water for a few miles, to ascertain the strength of some of the ocean currents of air, and as they were turning inward again Dave cried out:

"Look, there's a seagull trying to race with us, I do believe!" He pointed upward and there, in the air above them and off to one side, was one of the graceful birds.

"That's what it is!" exclaimed Mr. Dale. "And that reminds me of something I must do to oblige a friend. But first let us watch that seagull."

All eyes were now turned toward it. The swift bird seemed to realize that one of its own kind, or, more properly, a rival, was disputing the element so long unconquerable by man. The seagull would approach the giant airship as if to ascertain what it wanted in the upper regions, to learn its

speed and power. Then, as if alarmed at the noise of the propeller, or perhaps some of the odors of the escaping gas, the bird would veer off, only to return.

"Look!" cried Dave again. "It's going to see how much faster it can go than we do. It's trying to double on us, I declare!"

And that is exactly what the seagull did. Darting ahead it swung around a good distance in front of the airship, and then, as if to prove how puny was man, compared to nature, the bird darted straight back toward the craft.

"He's going to ram us—he'll be killed, sure!" yelled Mr. King.

"No, he's going to one side," declared Mr. Dale.

And that is what the bird did! Like an arrow it shot along the side of the *Albatross,* almost brushing the gas bags with its wing tips. To the rear swung the big bird. It's purpose was now plain. It was going to circle the airship.

"Two can play at that game!" cried Dave. "Let's put on all speed! Can we beat the seagull?"

"We certainly can," said Mr. King, in a quiet voice. He walked over to some of the signal buttons and pushed them. The effect was at once apparent. There was an increased tremor through the whole craft. It darted ahead and

cleaved the air as it had never done before. Once more Mr. King pressed a small lever. Again the trembling of the craft increased as if she would shake apart. But she was staunchly built.

"Can you see the gull?" demanded Mr. Dale.

"Yes, here he comes!" cried Dave. He's been to the stern, rounded it, and here he comes up alongside like the wind. He's trying to pass us!"

"But he never will," spoke Mr. King. "Here goes for the final test. Perhaps it's foolish to use our greatest speed on a new motor before it's been warmed up and run longer than this has, but we might as well know first as last just what the *Albatross* will do. Now for the test!"

He pressed a button that communicated with the motor room, and there came such a vibration to the craft that one and all, who were not aware of the reserve power, looked at one another in some alarm.

"How about it, Dave?" inquired Mr. King. "Are we holding our own?"

"Yes! Yes!" eagerly answered the young aviator. "The gull is straining every wing feather, but he's falling back. Look, no he's even with us now! He's going ahead—see—see!"

Was the *Albatross,* after all, to be beaten?

The gull was now flying alongside in such a position as to be visible to all. Clearly the bird

was exerting every last ounce of strength. Its wings were wildly beating the air, and it. slender head and hooked bill were stretched out like the prow of some slave-galley—cutting the air.

"It's falling back—it's falling back—we win!" cried Dave exultantly.

It was so. The gull, unable to keep up the terrific speed, was losing ground. The airship kept on, its awful power forcing it forward. Foot by foot the bird fell back until like some express train passing a slow freight, the *Albatross* shot ahead of the weary bird, and the creature, as if humiliated by the test, folded its wings and dropped downward like a shot, in order to rest. Then spreading wide its pinions again, it floated in the air, far below the rival craft.

"We sure did go!" cried Dave in triumph, as some of the terrific power was cut down. "But what was it you said you wanted to do, Mr. Dale —something that the sight of the gull reminded you about?"

"Oh, yes. Well, it's nothing more or less than to release a carrier pigeon I have on board."

"A carrier pigeon?" cried several.

"Yes, a friend of mine, who is interested in aeronautics, and who published a magazine about them, asked me to do this for him. He gave me a carrier pigeon a few days ago, and requested me to release it on our trial trip. I said I would,

and now I am going to send him a message of our success. The bird will fly directly to his coop, and later, when I give him the time we liberated it, and he notes the time of arrival, he can figure the speed."

"Good!" cried Dave. "Where is the pigeon?"

It was brought out in the basket where it had been held captive, and Mr. Dale, who understood such matters, prepared a short message on thin paper. The paper was put in a quill, sealed at both ends, and then tied by silk thread to one of the pigeon's wings.

The bird was taken to the deck of the craft and liberated. It soared high in the air, circled about once or twice and, then even in that void, seeming to get its bearings, it darted off to the south.

"Later we will learn how my friend received the message," said Mr. Dale. "And now I think we had better change our course."

The *Albatross* lined the coast a few miles to the interior. Until dusk Dave and the others viewed a constantly changing panorama. Then there was supper, a bountiful meal, well prepared, and immensely relished by all hands.

After that lights were set, the big headlights, front and rear, sending out far-reaching shafts of radiance that must have appeared to uninitiated landsmen as streaming meteors.

Mr. King was in the cabin when the electric call bell took him to the speaking tube. He dropped it as if some important message called him instantly to the pilot room.

His manner and face indicated to the young aviator that whatever message he had received had urged him to seriousness and haste.

"Something's up; eh, Dave?" shot out Hiram, as the airman hurried from the cabin.

"It looks that way," assented Dave. "I wonder what?"

CHAPTER XII

ADRIFT IN THE STORM

THE two young aviators, alive to every motion of the *Albatross* and the movements of its operators, sat together on one of the observation benches.

"I don't see any change in our course," remarked Hiram, glancing from the window.

"Neither do I," said Dave. "There's a flash, though."

"Yes, I saw it," spoke Hiram, quickly. "Lightning, wasn't it?"

"I think so. In fact, I am sure of it. Yes, it has all clouded up."

"And a wind coming," added Hiram. "What is it, Mr. Grimshaw?" he questioned, as there was a ring at the tube hook.

"Orders to close everything up fast and tight," reported the veteran aeronaut.

"Then there's a storm coming, sure enough," said Hiram.

Even before they had all the windows closed a change of atmosphere was noticeable. A blast of wind roared around the giant airship.

"Of course, this isn't serious," observed Hiram.

"Oh, I think not," rejoined the young aviator. "If the *Albatross* can't weather a little land zephyr, she's no good over the ocean."

"Mr. King is simply taking all precautions," said Dave.

"Whew! did you feel that!"

There was a whirl that made the young airmen think of their past experience in striking an air pocket when aboard their monoplane.

Bang! went a pitcher of water from the table in the center of the cabin.

"We're tipping," exclaimed Hiram.

"Yes, upwards," said Grimshaw.

"Trying to strike a calmer upper current, I fancy," suggested Mr. Dale.

Hiram made his way to a window and tried to peer out. The rain was beating in rattling dashes against the thick panes.

"Say," he reported, "if you want to see a sea of black ink, come here."

"I call it a blaze of dazzling light," submitted Grimshaw, as there was a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a tremendous crack of thunder.

"It's all below us now," reported Hiram, a few minutes later.

"We must be above the storm cloud, then," said Grimshaw.

"There's some wind yet, I'm thinking," observed Mr. Dale.

There came a signal from the tube bell just then. Grimshaw being nearest, took up the tube and received the message.

"You, Dashaway," he spoke in his quick, laconic way.

"From Mr. King?"

"Yes."

"All right."

The young aviator left the cabin at once. All over the hull of the great airship was an electric light system. The lamps were placed at intervals along the passages, and Dave found no difficulty in threading them. He arrived at the pilot room to find Mr. King at the glass table and Professor Leblance holding his hand out through a small porthole, the inside glass shield of which was thrown back.

The airman looked serious and occupied with the various buttons on the table. The Frenchman's face wore a somewhat anxious look.

He drew in his arm. As he did so Dave observed that his hand held a little meteorological instrument he had noticed before. It was a

barometric contrivance. The professor held it up to the light and scanned its surface closely.

"It won't do at all," he announced. "The index is not broad enough to give exact conditions."

"There is the aerometer, Professor," suggested Mr. King.

"Did I not tell you I found one of its tubes shattered? Such carelessness! I would no more start across the ocean without a perfect instrument then without food."

"Then it's a stop?"

"Somewhere."

"And a descent?"

"Of course."

"When, and where?"

Professor Leblance indulged in his accustomed shrug of the shoulders.

"I dare not descend, not knowing the exact conditions below, as I stated. We are on a fair level."

"Then why not continue till the situation clears?"

"We can only run one way."

"Yes, with the storm, but we are not leaving the coast line to any appreciable degree."

"That is true, but we may get too far south."

"Oh, we can soon make that up. We will have to land near some large city, I suppose, to get what you want."

"Not necessarily," replied the Frenchman. "All I need is some quicksilver. I have plenty of surplus tubes."

"Well, what is the programme?"

"Straight ahead, watching the wind gauge and the grade guide."

"Very good."

"I will go to the engine room."

"Come here, Dashaway," ordered the expert airman.

His junior assistant was prompt to gain the side of his superior.

"You understand the guide?" inquired Mr. King.

"It is on the same principle as the aeroplane apparatus?"

"Yes."

"Then—perfectly," assented Dave.

"Watch it closely for variations, and the wind record. If the mirror shows a deviation past the fifteen mark, notify me."

"And the wind?"

"Over fifty miles an hour is dangerous."

"And we will have to descend?"

"Or ascend, that's it."

Dave seated himself in a chair at one end of the table. The guide, a delicately adjusted instrument, recorded every variation in the progress of the airship. The wind gauge was con-

nected by wires with a vane on top of the gas bag.

Dave turned to his duty with interest and carefulness. His monoplane experience stood him in good stead. He felt a great deal of satisfaction in realizing that he was actually sharing in operating the *Albatross,* and in addition to that learning something practical and of value.

Inside of five minutes he had mastered the requirements of the occasion and was working in entire harmony with the airman.

For over three hours the *Albatross* was kept on as perfectly straight a course as could be mapped out.

"We seem to have encountered a heavy southwest storm of great extent," Mr. King told him.

"Have we got to pass over its entire length before we land?" asked the young aviator.

"Professor Leblance thinks that plan best," replied Mr. King.

It must have been nearly midnight when the Frenchman came back from the engine room.

"Superb!" was his first commendatory word. "The *Albatross* does not seem to have strained a seam. I must congratulate you both."

The airman smiled pleasantly at this praise and Dave bowed modestly. The professor again took the barometric readings.

"I think we have hit the tail of the wind," he

announced a few minutes later. "As soon as we are sure of it, we will make a descent."

"What's that?" suddenly called out the young aviator.

Boom! A great shock traversed the airship!

Boom—boom—twice in succession there followed a muffled bang, and it was apparent that the sounds were caused by some trouble in the airship.

Professor Leblance rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XIII

A FIRST LANDING

THE young aviator was not unused to " thrills " in his professional experience. He noted no deviation in the straight progress of the *Albatross*. Mr. King did not distract attention from the signal plate. Still Dave awaited some explanation of the detonation with curiosity and anxiety.

" It's all right," reported Professor Leblance, reappearing a few minutes later..

" Explosions? " questioned the airman, simply.

" Yes. Three of the balloonets blew up."

" Which means? "

" Nothing," replied the Frenchman, with his accustomed shrug of the shoulders. " We must have struck a warm current. Ah, yes, that is true," he added, as he made the thermometer test. " You see, the sudden transition from cold caused an expansion and affected the balloonets."

" Does that weaken the lifting force, Professor? " inquired Dave.

" Not perceptibly. I count on such accidents,

more or less. I can duplicate the balloonets, and as to the gas—we have arranged for all necessary replenishment in that direction. Mr. King, everything is favorable for a descent."

"All right," replied the airman. "Have you any idea where we are?"

"I should say, south of Washington."

"In Virginia, then?"

"Or still farther south. I have measured the distance covered since our start, but I do not know how far we are inland."

Mr. King left Dave in charge of the signal table for a few moments. He went to the lookout, meantime instructing the young aviator as to what buttons he should operate. This brought the *Albatross* on a lateral slant. The enormous headlight at the prow of the airship cast a glow far below. Mr. King was able to trace outlines on the landscape. He returned to the pilot table, and following his directions there were many changes made in the course of the giant airship during the next half hour.

Once more the aviator consulted the lookout. Then, back again at his post, he ordered a slow-up and a gentle, gradual drop.

"Landed," breathed Dave at last, intensely interested in all the gentle and natural movements of the descent.

"Yes, and that was certainly easy," replied his

patron, with a sigh of relief and satisfaction. "The professor understands his business."

The Frenchman soon appeared, followed by two of his assistants. The aviator and Dave accompanied him to the cabin.

"You people had better go to bed," he directed all hands. "My men will attend to securing the machine safe and sound. We can do nothing now until morning."

This order was obeyed. Dave and Hiram had what might be called a stateroom to themselves. It was narrow, but cozy. It had a window opening, and there the young aviator posted himself for some time.

By the aid of the headlights Dave could make out Leblance and his men securing the *Albatross*. The craft seemed to have landed on flat land rather bare of verdure and with no trees.

"An ideal spot for landing," Dave reported to his comrade.

"Yes, but where are we?" questioned Hiram.

"In some wild mountain district, I should say," responded Dave—"maybe Virginia, maybe North Carolina."

"Well, it has been a dandy cruise," declared Hiram. "Say, I've gone through so much excitement I don't believe I can sleep a wink."

"Try it, anyhow," recommended Dave. "There may be a lot to do in the morning, and

we want to be rested and strong to take our share in it."

How long he rested Dave Dashaway did not know, but he was suddenly awakened by feeling the *Albatross* moving. At first he imagined that he must be dreaming, for certainly he did not think they would start off again after making a landing with such trouble.

"But she sure is moving," decided the lad, "though not in the air, if my senses are good for anything. That is unless we're bumping along a cloud bank."

He sat up in his berth, and could make out a dim light in the room beyond. He listened and heard Hiram breathing heavily.

"He's fast asleep, anyhow," decided the young aviator. "It takes a good deal to disturb him. But we sure are moving. I wonder——?"

Such a strange thought came to him that he hesitated to put in into form. But he decided to reason it out.

"Can it be?" he mused, "that I have slept through a whole night and day without knowing it, and that we are on the move again. Can anything have happened—to me—or the others? Have—I been unconscious—hurt—and not have known what has happened? It doesn't seem possible, and yet——"

His self-communing was interrupted by a more

violent motion of the airship. It seemed to careen to one side, and then right itself. Dave found himself clutching the sides of his bunk. Then came a period of calm.

"I'm going to wake Hiram up," decided Dave. "He may not like it, but I want to talk to some one about this, and if he gets mad, in case it isn't anything, he can easily get to sleep again. And that's what I won't do unless I find out what's going on."

Dave cautiously got out of bed. As he did so he again felt the lurch of the big craft. At the same time he heard a voice speaking softly outside.

"By hickory!" came the tones. "I don't seem to be movin' th' ole shebang much. Guess I'll hev t' go git another mule critter or two t' snake it away. Whoa there!"

"What in the name of sweet spirits of nitre is going on?" murmured Dave. "Is some one trying to steal the *Albatross?*"

He crossed softly to look out of one of the windows, but could see nothing. The big headlights had been distinguished, and, save for some few incandescents here and there, which were only dimly glowing there was no illumination inside the ship. It had been decided to make it dark so all hands would sleep better.

"This is sure mysterious," went on Dave. "I

can't see anything, but I can hear, and I can—feel!" he added a moment later, for again the craft moved slightly.

Once more the young aviator peered out, but he could discern nothing. The night was very black.

"If I thought——" he began, when a sleepy voice from the adjoining berth inquired:

"Whatsmatter, Dave? Time f'r brkfust?"

"Hiram! Hiram!" whispered Dave shrilly. "Wake up! Something has happened—it's happening now!"

Instantly Hiram sat upright in his bed. He was rather a slow chap, but on occasions could move lively.

"What is it?" he inquired in a low voice. Burglars in here, Dave?"

"I don't know. Maybe it is and maybe it isn't. Anyhow, I don't think they're in yet."

"All right, then; wait until they do get in an' we'll nab 'em. Lay low!"

"That's just what I don't want to do," replied Dave. "Something may happen unless we get busy. They may even get away with the *Albatross.*"

"Get away with the *Albatross?*" cried Hiram. What are you talking about, Dave? How can they——?"

But he did not finish his sentence. At that mo-

ment there came another lurch to the craft, and it moved several feet.

"There!" hoarsely whispered Dave. "What did I tell you?"

"Are we going up—a night flight?" asked Hiram.

"I don't know. I was awakened by the movement, and it's been going on ever since. Someone is outside, that's sure. Listen now!"

There was silence for a moment, and then a cautious voice could be heard saying:

"I suah will have t' done go an' git another mule critter t' move this contraption. An' I ain't got no mo' of my own. I'll have to borrow one off Nate Jackson, an' then he'll want me t' whack up with him. Wa'al, there ain't no help, fer as I kin see!"

"There!" exclaimed Dave in triumph.

"It sure is strange," said Hiram. "I guess we'd better wake up the others. Mr. King and Mr. Dale ought to know about this."

But there was no need for the boys to awaken their companions. The next moment there came such a violent motion to the ship that not a sleeper continued to slumber. With one accord they tumbled out of their berths.

Then from without came a chorus of excited shouts.

"Whoa, there! Consarn ye all, what d' ye

mean by backin' and fillin' that a-way? Stand still, pesky mule critters that ye be! Ye wouldn't pull this shebang when I wanted ye to, an' now ye're tryin' t' run away with it. Whoa!"

"Who's there?" cried Mr. King.

"What is going on?" demanded Mr. Dale.

"Something has happened!" shouted Professor Leblance.

"That's right!" agreed Dave, "and it's going on now."

"Someone is trying to make off with the airship," added Hiram.

"Make off with the airship!" repeated the professor. Can it be——"

He did not finish, but in a moment he had switched on a number of lights, including the two big ones outside the craft. Then, as they looked from the windows, they saw a strange sight.

An unkempt man, with a team of sorry-looking mules, had fastened a rope to the *Albatross* and was evidently trying to drag it away. He started back in alarm at the sudden illumination, and hastily began taking off the rope.

"Here! What are you trying to do?" cried Mr. King, through an open window.

"Good land! Is there folks in this shebang!" asked the mountaineer. "Land a'massy! I thought it was a balloon that had come down."

"And you were going to haul it away and

claim a reward, I suppose," put in the professor, beginning to understand the situation.

"That's what I was, stranger" came the answer. "But my mules wa'n't strong enough. I was goin' arter another pair when yo'-all turned up your kerosene lamps. She wouldn't hardly bulge."

"I should say not, with the way she is fastened," said the Frenchman. "But explain yourself, monsieur."

"That ain't my name, but it don't much matter," came the answer. "I was on my way home from th' settlement, with a load of stuff t' keep my wife an' kids in bacon an' flour, when I seen ye come down last evenin'. I once went t' a county fair, an' they had a balloon assent. Th' perfesser offered five dollars t' whoever'd git his balloon arter he jumped out of it, an' she drifted away.

"Nate Jackson was th' lucky man, an' he found th' balloon in Black Cedar swamp. He hauled it t' town an' got his five. When I seen this contraption come down, I just laid low, aimin' t' git th' reward. I s'posed you folks would all go home until mornin' anyhow. But ye didn't. I onhitched my mules arter dark, an' got a rope from my wagon, an' tried t' haul th' balloon away. But she wouldn't haul. I'm mighty sorry if I disturbed ye' an' I'll travel on now. This is th'

most forsaken country I ever knowed, an' it's hard t' git money. I thought I saw an easy way t' make a five dollar bill."

"It's worth more than that to have our airship let alone, my man," said the professor. "This is the kind of a balloon you never saw before. Here are ten dollars for the wife and little ones," and he passed over a bill.

The man was overwhelmingly grateful and apologized again for the trouble he had caused. A hasty examination showed that he had not damaged the craft any by his pulling and hauling, and a little later he had disappeared in the darkness with his "mule critters," and soon the rumble of his wagon over the road, that was hardly more than a trail, came fainter and fainter to the ears of the aviators.

"Well, that sure was a scare!" exclaimed Dave, when quiet was once more restored.

"I should say yes!" agreed Hiram. "The idea of trying to cart off the *Albatross!*"

"Well, his explanation was natural," said the professor. "These mountaineers, in this lonely region, scarcely ever see money, I guess. But now, boys, get to bed. We've got lots to do tomorrow."

Everyone again retired after the lights had again been turned low, and Dave and Hiram were soon asleep again. It was two hours after day-

light when Grimshaw routed them out of their berths.

"Come, get up here," he ordered; "if you don't want to miss breakfast."

"I certainly don't," announced the active Hiram. "I'm hungry as a bear."

"Well, there's a capital meal waiting for you," observed the old aeronaut.

The boys found this true as they came in at second table in the cabin. They hurried through with the meal, for outside on the ground Mr. King and the others were assembled. From their actions the young aviator concluded that some active discussion was in progress.

Exit from the cabin was made through a trap door and a balancing ladder.

"Hurrah!" piped Hiram, as he reached the ground. "Here's a chance to stretch our legs and breathe some fresh air."

"Let's see what is going on with the others," suggested Dave, and they approached the group made up of Professor Leblance, Mr. King, Grimshaw and Mr. Dale.

"We are evidently in some remote spot," the Frenchman was saying. "All the better that, for we shall have no troublesome visitors. My men can attend to the balloonet and some other needful repairs while we send for that quicksilver."

"Which means the location of the nearest

town?" submitted the airman. "There was so much excitement last night I forgot to ask that old mountaineer. But we must locate a store."

"Exactly."

"And that may be somewhat difficult."

"Perhaps," agreed the Frenchman, "but once down in the valley yonder it is to be supposed there are some tokens of civilization."

"Who is to go?" inquired Mr. Dale.

"I think you had better entrust the matter to me, Professor," said the aviator. "Here, let one of the boys—you, Dashaway—go with me."

"I shall be glad," said Dave, eagerly.

"Hold on," broke in Hiram; "give me a show too; won't you, Mr. King?"

The aviator took a brief look at the earnest, beseeching face of the willing and accommodating young aeronaut, and smiled indulgently.

"Well, you two make a hardy, useful team, so make it so, if you like."

Arrangements were made for the departure at once. It was understood that the *Albatross* would remain at its present landing place until the exploring party returned with the quicksilver, even if they had to consume considerable time in locating a town.

"I think we can make it and return by nightfall," said the airman. "Don't worry, though, if we are longer away."

"No," spoke the professor. "We can't leave till we get that quicksilver, no matter how long it takes."

A plentiful lunch, a compass, and a gun were gotten ready by the cabin man. Then, waving a cheery adieu to their friends, the airman and the boys started down the mountain side.

CHAPTER XIV

LOST

"It's no use, Dave."

"Why not?"

"We've shouted ourselves hoarse, and in this still air and the way we have kept up the hollering, anyone could hear us five miles away, it seems to me."

"Then there is only one conclusion to arrive at," observed the young aviator quite seriously.

"What's that, Dave?"

"We are lost."

"I reckon you're right," assented Hiram ruefully, dropping to the ground and reclining on the grass.

His companion followed his example. It was six o'clock in the afternoon, the sun was descending, and at the end of ten hours spent in persistent search of a town or settlement, this had been the result of their hard travel and laborious investigations.

The trio who had left the *Albatross* had kept together until about noon. Not a wagon track or

even a footpath had they come across, much less a human habitation. The landscape seemed as wild and untenanted as if it were a primeval wilderness.

"I hardly know what to do," said the old aviator, about the middle of the afternoon, as they concluded a rest and a lunch.

"Yes, we may go on for miles and miles and not run across a human being," returned Hiram, who was tired out.

"I have half a mind to return to the *Albatross* while we are pretty sure to find our way," remarked Mr. King; "and advise that we make an air flight for civilized territory."

"We might try as far as the other side of that big hill," suggested Dave, pointing to a lofty eminence in the distance.

"That may not be a bad idea," replied Mr. King. "See here, we'll make a circuit. It can't be over a few miles. I'll trail the valley this way; you boys take the other direction, and we'll meet on the other side of the hill."

"That's a good arrangement," declared Hiram; and the divided journey was begun.

It proved a very unwise experiment, the way things turned out. The circuit was not so easy to follow as it had seemed. Pursuing a ravine and its branches, at the end of three hours the boys found themselves inextricably mixed up as to location or direction, with so many hills in view that

they could not tell which was the one they had had in view when they separated from the aviator.

"Yes," observed Hiram now, looking rather hopelessly about them; "we're lost, that's sure."

"Then the thing is to find ourselves," said Dave, cheerily.

"Worst of all, Mr. King has got all the lunch," mourned Hiram. "See here, Dave, when are you going to make a start from here?"

"Why, when we get rested we'll press right forward and get to a town or back to the *Albatross.*"

"That's easily said; but not done."

"Well, we can try; can't we?"

"I suppose so."

Hiram was out of sorts. His gloom somewhat abated, however, and finally walking on, they came across a big patch of wild raspberries. When, a little later, Dave discovered a pecan tree, Hiram quite recovered his spirits.

"I hardly hope to rejoin Mr. King," said Dave. "I think I can keep the general direction of the *Albatross* in view. What I say is to brace up and keep steadily ahead for a few hours, and see if we don't come across something encouraging. There's a full moon, you know. Besides, at night we could make out lights at a distance. You see, even if we fail, we can surely get back to the airship."

"Not if we lose our reckoning."

"Yes, even then," persisted Dave.

"How can we?"

"Why, I heard Professor Leblance tell Mr. King that if we did not return by midnight, he would have the big searchlight on the *Albatross* at work."

"That's grand!" cried Hiram, bracing up magically. "We can see the searchlight for a good many miles, you know."

The wayfarers threaded several tortuous valleys. They reasoned that if they could get out of the mountains they were sure to come upon some little farm. It was near dusk when Hiram, who was a little in advance of Dave, shouted suddenly:

"Here's something!"

"What is it?" questioned our hero, hurrying up to where he stood.

His companion held up what looked like a broken tree branch, only the bark had been peeled off from it, and one end had evidently been fashioned into a handle with a pocket knife.

"Someone driving live stock has been here—lately, too," declared Hiram, inspecting the whip. "It broke, and he threw it away. Hold on. I was long enough on a farm to trail a cattle track, if there's one around here. Yes, there is," and the speaker's tone rose in volume as he bent over

and, running along, inspected the ground keenly.

"Found it?" asked the young aviator, pressing close after his comrade.

"Yes. It's plain enough, now. Come on, Dave; we're in luck, sure."

They could now make out a beaten track, and tell the irregularities in the ground made by the trampling of many feet. The track finally ended at the edge of a small stream.

"Here's where they forded the brook," explained Hiram. "We'll take off our shoes and stockings and wade over."

This they did. The opposite bank gained, they saw through a fringe of bushes what looked like a level field. They could hear occasional bleatings.

"Oh, say, we're all right now," declared the sanguine Hiram.

They hurried on their shoes, eager to pursue their investigations.

"The sheep are over yonder," said Hiram, pointing to a corner of the field. "We're surely near some farm now. I shouldn't wonder if we found some one guarding the sheep, too, for—hear that!"

It was the echo of distant yelping and barking to which Hiram called attention.

"Wolves?" asked Dave, guessing quickly.

"That's what; I know them. Saw lots of them

when I was out West. Come ahead. We're going to find somebody right away, I'm sure."

The boys now noticed a little knoll. The bleating sounds seemed to echo from behind it. As they started up the incline, Hiram grabbed his companion in some affright and dismay, and both fell back startled.

A sudden flash split the air. It started a sweep in a perfect circle, like a revolving searchlight. Its bright rays sent out a glare a hundred yards from its base. Then, the circle complete, as suddenly it died out.

"Now what do you think of that?" gasped the bewildered Hiram. "Worse, and more of it!"

Bang!

From the same spot, just as abruptly, some gun or cannon belched out a sheet of flame, followed by a report that awoke the echoes for miles in every direction.

Facing a mystery they could not explain, the two young aviators stood staring mutely towards the spot from which flash and report had so unaccountably come.

CHAPTER XV

"THE TERRIBLE MACGUFFINS"

"Now what do you think of that?" challenged Hiram, after a long spell of wondering silence.

"I don't think it was intended for us," responded the young aviator.

"Why not?"

"Because that revolving light, or whatever it is, flashed in every direction, and that firearm wasn't aimed towards us."

"That's so," agreed Hiram. "But what was it done for at all?"

"We had better try and find out," suggested the young aviator.

The boys waited for some little time, expecting a renewal of the strange manifestations, but it did not come. Then Dave led the way, creeping up the incline. As they reached the top of the knoll, they paused and looked about them. Sheltered in a kind of a dip of the ground, they could make out half a hundred sheep huddled together. No human being was visible.

"There's the contrivance that flashed and

fired," announced Hiram, pointing to a small raised platform at the edge of the knoll.

"I guess it is," assented the young aviator; "go slow, Hiram. No need to run any risks."

Neither could refrain from satisfying his curiosity as to the purpose of the device near to them. As they neared it, proceeding cautiously, the bright rays of the moon, just rising, showed clear outlines of the platform and the object upon it.

"Hark—listen!" ordered Dave, suddenly.

As they waited a sharp tick—tick, regular and prolonged, struck their hearing.

"It's a clock," declared Hiram. "Look there—seven or eight gun barrels. And wires running to that box. There's clock works in it. See, the light is still burning, but shut in with a cover."

"That's so," nodded Dave, surprised and still puzzled.

"Oh, say!" cried Hiram, suddenly, "I've guessed out the whole scheme."

"Have you?"

"I think so."

'What is it?" asked the young aviator.

"Why, this is a contrivance for scaring away wolves. It's mighty cute, and it must be a smart fellow who got it up. Don't you see, probably every hour the light flashes and one of those firearms goes off. That would scare wolves good and right."

"I believe you have solved the problem," said Dave.

He was certain of it as they made a closer inspection of the queer contrivance. Some backwood genius had spent time and some money in rigging up a wolf-scarer that kept up an alarm and illumination through the night, serving as a protection for the sheepfold.

"Of course there's a house somewhere near," said Hiram, as they started from the spot.

"Yes, look there—a light!" cried Dave.

What looked like a candle or lamp in a window showed at a little distance. The young adventurers hurried along with a good deal of satisfaction.

They finally reached a roomy log cabin with a barn behind it. As they passed around the house they were unable to discover anybody about the premises. They knocked and then hammered at the front door. There was no response, and Hiram shouted, but no one appeared. Walking around the house, they could see through the uncurtained windows into every room.

"There's no one in the house, it seems," said the young aviator.

"Probably gone to some neighbor's," suggested Hiram.

"What is that?" suddenly exclaimed Dave.

Towards the southeast a growing glare showed

in the sky. It increased in brightness each moment.

"It's a fire!" declared Dave.

"I think so, too. Let's run for it," spoke Hiram.

They had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile when shots and then shouts rang out on the still night air.

"Someone is running this way," said Dave.

Against the radiance of the mingled fire glow and the moonlight the boys saw a woman hurriedly crossing a clear space beyond the trees. She held a baby in her arms. A little girl she clasped by the hand. The baby was crying, and the woman, with many a fearful glance back of her, was sobbing audibly.

She came directly towards the boys. Dave stepped forward in her path. The woman drew back with a shriek of alarm.

"Don't be frightened," said Dave.

"You do not belong to the raiders?" the woman faltered, all in a tremble.

"What raiders?" asked Hiram.

"The MacGuffins—the terrible MacGuffins!" almost wailed the woman.

"Who are they?"

"Don't you know?" asked the woman, incredulously.

"We are strangers here, madam," explained

the young airman. "What is the fire and what is the trouble?"

"All our men are away—hiding from the officers down at Brambly Fork," said the woman. "The MacGuffins have made a raid and are burning us all out! They may kill us if they catch us. Oh, sirs, help me get our little ones in hiding," she pleaded.

"To your home, do you mean?" inquired Dave.

"Oh, no, no," dissented the woman instantly. "That is the worst place in the world to go to just now. They will burn our house next."

"They may not harm you," suggested Dave.

"Yes, they will. My husband is the man they hate the most. It's an old quarrel between the MacGuffins and our people. They will harm you, too, if they catch you."

"Why should they?" asked Hiram.

"Because no stranger is ever allowed in these Carolina mountains. They are all moonshiners, and will take you for detectives. They shot two suspicious characters only a few days ago."

"H'm," remarked Hiram under his breath. "We're in a nice country!"

The young aviator comprehended the situation at once. He had read and heard of these North Carolina outlaws and their family feuds, sometimes running through half a dozen generations.

"How can we help you?" he said to the woman.

"It isn't safe for us anywhere around here," she declared. "I must get to my husband."

"At Brambly Fork, you mean?"

"Yes, that's where he is, and his crowd."

"Is it far from here?"

"About fifteen miles. He ought to know about the MacGuffins, so as to drive them away before they steal our cattle and crops. I can manage to get along with the baby, but the little girl is ready to drop down from tiredness. See, oh, hide! hide! They are coming this way!"

Among the trees beyond the clearing the boys could see men with torches and armed with rifles coming in their direction.

"They are going to fire our house next!" cried the woman, bursting into tears.

"I am afraid it would be foolish for us to try and prevent them," remarked Dave. "They are armed and in a dangerous mood."

Dave led the way to a thick copse. The woman "You would simply risk your lives."

The young aviator snatched up the little girl in his arms.

"Help the lady, Hiram," he directed, "and follow me."

Dave led the way to a thick copse. The woman told the little girl to keep perfectly quiet. In a

few minutes the men they had seen passed by without discovering them.

"I must get to my husband at once," said the woman, eagerly, as soon as the horde of raiders was out of sight and hearing.

"You can't go alone," observed Dave. "Here, we will go with you. Take turns at carrying the little girl, Hiram."

The woman sobbed out her heartfelt gratitude. Then Dave questioned her as to the direction of Brambly Fork, and all were soon on the way.

"This isn't looking for Mr. King, Dave," suggested Hiram, after awhile.

"Mr. King will take care of himself, Hiram," replied the young aviator.

"Yes, but neither is this looking for a town where we might get that quicksilver."

"It's on the way to it, isn't it? When we get to the place where this woman's husband is, some of the crowd can direct us to the nearest settlement, that is sure."

It was pretty hard traveling, after a day of heavy tramping. The forlorn condition of the woman, however, appealed to both the boys.

"We are very near Brambly Fork now," spoke the woman at the end of four hours, during which time they had rested frequently. "Another turn in the valley and we will be there."

"Sure enough!" cried Hiram with animation.

They had come upon a spot well shut in on three sides with trees. A big campfire was burning, and near it were gathered a dozen or more men. Their interest was centered on a man who stood with his arms bound behind him.

"Why," cried Dave, "it's Mr. King!"

CHAPTER XVI

IN FRIENDLY HANDS

THE young aviator did not delay for a single instant. So precipitately did he start for the group about the tree, that he fairly knocked Hiram off his footing.

"The mischief!" gasped the latter, righting himself and staring aghast at the scene a little distance ahead of them.

"Stop! stop!" shouted Dave at the top of his voice, as he dashed across the open stretch, and momentarily came nearer and nearer to the men who surrounded the airmen.

Dave had a right to be urgent, for two men had seized hold of Mr. King as if to handle him roughly.

Three rifles were aimed at Dave as he fearlessly ran up to the group. One of the party, evidently the leader, stared at our hero as he came to a halt, with a suspicious and threatening scowl.

"Hello," he challenged, "another one? Why, strangers are getting thick as bees in swarming time."

"It's another detective," growled a man by his side.

Dave faced the fierce-visaged, reckless-mannered mob, all alive with anxiety and excitement.

"You must not harm that man," he declared, dauntlessly.

"Know him, do you?" inquired the leader, with a sinister look.

"I should say I did. There's some mistake."

"Who is he?"

"He is Mr. Robert King, the great aviator."

"H'm! that's what he said, but we don't believe him," retorted the leader. "Look at that badge on him."

"Why, that is a trophy from an aero club," explained Dave. "Read what it says, and you'll see that I am telling the truth."

"Say, sonny," observed the man, with a derisive laugh, "there ain't any schoolhouses in this district, and none of us know how to read. Now then, who are you, and where did you come from?"

"I am in the same line as Mr. King," replied Dave; "and I came from the spot where our airship landed."

"How did you find us?"

"Oh, yes," said Dave, quickly. "I ran across the MacGuffins. They were making a raid, and——"

If the young aviator had thrown a firebrand among the group he could not have caused more excitement. At the mention of that dread name, "the MacGuffins," it seemed as though the men before him uttered a fearful roar of hatred and rage. The leader sprang forward and grasped Dave's arm.

"Don't you fool me!" he shouted. "Where did you run across the MacGuffins?"

"About fifteen miles north of here. They were burning houses, and——"

Dave was interrupted by a cry. It proceeded from the woman he and Hiram had helped. She appeared now upon the scene carrying her babe, and Hiram following with the little girl in his arms.

"Jared!" cried the woman, and then Dave knew that the leader of the outlaw band was her husband. The man stared at her in bewilderment.

"Nance," he spoke in a husky voice, "what does it mean, you being here?"

"Oh, Jared, the MacGuffins!" she wailed. "They have burned us out! If it wasn't for these two brave boys, we might all have been killed! They hid us and helped me get here with the children."

"You did this?" spoke the man in a choked-up tone, turning to the young aviator. "And that fellow is your friend?"

"Yes, sir."

"Set him free," ordered the man with a wave of his hand towards Mr. King. "As to you, young man, you've made some friends, let me tell you."

Dave and Hiram hurried eagerly to the spot where two of the band began immediately to liberate Mr. King, who had looked worn and worried. A glad smile of relief now covered his face.

"You came just in the nick of time," he told his two young friends.

"It looks so," said Hiram, seriously.

"There's a bad nest of them," cautioned the airman. "I never met such stubborn, unreasonable beings. They seem to have two objects in life—to fight each other and dodge revenue officers."

"Regular outlaws, aren't they?" queried Hiram.

"Yes, and with little idea of the value of human life."

The band grouped together about the woman, who was reciting the incidents of the raid of the MacGuffins. Wild shouts and threats followed her story. The party split up, and half of them ran to a thicket, to reappear with horses.

At a word from the leader they set off in the direction the refugees had just come from. Then

the man approached the airman and his companions.

"We're rough fellows, maybe," he said, "but we stick like glue to a friend. You two young fellows saved my Nance and the babies. There isn't much we fellows wouldn't do for you in return."

"Well, you can probably help us out a good deal if you want to," replied Dave promptly.

"Just name how, son."

"Mr. King has told you how we are balloonists. We need some quicksilver, and the three of us had started out to locate some town where we could get the article."

"Quicksilver, eh?" repeated the outlaw, as though dubious and puzzled. "Where would you be likely to get it now?"

"Most hardware or drug stores keep it," explained Dave.

"Nothing else you need?"

"No, only to return to our balloon when we get the quicksilver."

"Hi!" shouted the man, beckoning to two of his men. "Mount and make a quick run for Forestville. How much quicksilver do you want?"

"It comes in iron tubes," explained the airman. "One will answer. If they keep it in some other form, about thirty ounces."

"Get back soon as you can," the outlaw ordered his messengers. "If the places are shut, shoot up the town and get some action on the case."

The speaker turned and proceeded to where a tent stood. In a little while he reappeared to say to his guests that they must be hungry and to follow him.

Seated on rude home-made camp stools, the three friends enjoyed a meal of corn pone, sweet potatoes and wild turkey, all cooked to a turn. Then their host threw some blankets on the ground outside. He invited them to be seated, and for over an hour asked question after question regarding their wonderful airship and the great world beyond the wilderness of which he knew so little.

"We're perfectly safe to sleep here," remarked Mr. King, as the man left them finally.

"More than safe," declared Dave. "These people would protect us with their lives, the way they feel about us."

The wayfarers were pretty well tired out. All three were soon asleep. It must have been two hours later when Dave felt himself roughly shaken. The outlaw leader and two others were standing near, staring up into the sky in an awed, puzzled way.

"What's that?" asked the outlaw leader of

the young aviator. "It's strange to us, and I thought you'd know."

Across the sky in the direction of the airship a broad sweeping pencil of light swept the heavens from zenith to horizon, and back again.

"Ah, that?" said Dave; "it's the great searchlight of the *Albatross*."

CHAPTER XVII

A TRUSTY GUIDE

THE young aviator had to do some explaining for the benefit of the outlaw leader before the latter could understand what a searchlight was.

"Reckon there's no spot safe for a free and easy fellow with all these new-fangled contrivances," remarked the man.

"I'd like to see that balloon, all the same," observed one of his band.

"We'd better keep close to the safety line," advised the leader. "There's a good deal of hubbub around, and we'd better watch out for the MacGuffins."

It was an hour later when the two men sent to Forestville came galloping back into camp. They were hot, tired and dusty. Their steeds were reeking, and dropped their heads in an exhausted way as their riders drove up to the campfire and dismounted.

"Did you get the stuff?" inquired the leader.

"That's what you sent us for, wasn't it?" queried one of the horsemen. "Well, there it is," and he handed out a package.

"We had some trouble making the drug clerk understand how badly and quickly we needed it," remarked the other horseman, with a chuckle. "When we told him that Forestville would be off the map in a few days if he didn't act lively, he produced results double quick."

Mr. King examined the package. It contained two large glass tubes filled with quicksilver. He thanked the men heartily. His hand went to his pocket and his purse was half withdrawn to offer a reward, when he noted a warning flash in the eyes of the leader.

"Don't try to pay for what money wouldn't get you if you weren't friends," said the man, tersely.

"We are anxious to get back to the airship, suggested the airman.

"Want to start right away?"

"Yes, if possible."

"That searchlight signal will guide you?"

"Oh, surely. Besides, I think we could find our way without its aid."

"Maybe. Just the same, I'll go with you as far as the gap. That's hard to cross unless you know it pretty well, or hit a trail by accident, as you seem to have done in getting here. Hi, there, saddle up four fresh horses," ordered the speaker to one of his men.

"This is pretty fine treatment," declared the

young aviator, as his friends and himself found themselves in the saddle and the outlaw leader piloting the way from the camp.

"It will take my wife a long time to forget all we owe you," the leader remarked more than once.

At the end of two hours' travel, the latter stages of which were taken through dark and sinuous windings along a densely-verdured ravine, their pilot ascended a long slope.

"There's your searchlight still going," he said, pointing to the broad waving flare in the sky. "I dare not go any farther with you for two reasons," he explained. "In the first place I'm over what we call the safety line. In the next place I want to get back in time to start a daylight hunt after those MacGuffins."

"I feel sure we can find our way to the *Albatross* now," said the young aviator.

"Say, that was a queer adventure, wasn't it now?" spoke Hiram, as their recent guide waved his hand in a friendly way and disappeared like a flash back the route they had come.

"These rough fellows are true blue when you touch the right spot," declared the airman. "We seem to be on higher level ground than before. Let us get along as fast as we can, so we can send the horses back."

The outlaw leader had insisted that they retain

the steeds. He had instructed them to simply head them back homewards when they were through with them.

"Don't fret," he had said, confidently, "they'll be sure to find the camp feeding trough before breakfast time."

"This has been quite an adventure, as you say, Hiram," remarked Mr. King, as they trotted single file on account of the narrow course.

"With probably a lot more of it waiting us along the line," added Dave.

"Yes," assented Hiram, "I can guess it will be pretty lively if we cross the Atlantic. Say, we're getting near to the *Albatross*."

This was apparent from the clearer radiance from the searchlight glow. They rode on about two miles further.

"We can do the rest on foot, I fancy," said Mr. King.

The party dismounted, arranged the bridles so they would not trail, turned the heads of the horses homewards for them, and, giving each a slap on the flanks, watched them dart away rapidly.

The searchlight faded out before they had proceeded a mile. In fact, day was breaking. The sun came up as they reached the bottom of a high hill.

"I remember this spot," said the young aviator.

"Yes, we left the camp this way," agreed Mr. King, casting a look about and recognizing some landmarks.

"I suppose Professor Leblance has been mighty anxious about us," said Hiram. "I'll have a great story to tell Mr. Grimshaw."

Despite the arduous rigors of their all-day tramp and all-night adventures, Dave and Hiram felt fresh and ambitious.

"We're pretty near the top," spoke the young aviator. "I'll race you to see who arrives first."

"All right," agreed Hiram. "Here we go."

Dave showed the most endurance. He reached the summit, paused and waved his hand triumphantly at his toiling rival.

"Hold on," called Hiram. "Wait for Mr. King."

"I'll take a look first," answered Dave.

The young aviator climbed over a low ledge of boulders. Beyond them was a fringe of high bushes. Dave knew that, these passed, the *Albatross* would be in view.

He pressed his way through the bushes and cleared the last obstruction at a leap. Then the young aviator took one look, uttered a dismayed cry, and fairly dived back in among the undergrowth, startled beyond expression.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN A BAD FIX

"KEEP back!" shouted the young aviator.

He accompanied the words with a spring and a roll that took him through and past the fringe of bushes and brought him directly against Hiram.

"Hold on, I say. The mischief!" blurted out Hiram, tipped clear off his balance.

"Hush!" warned Dave, regaining his feet. "Don't go ahead, don't make any disturbance. Stop Mr. King."

Dave spoke the words in a hurried and urgent tone. Then, cautiously, he crept on all fours through the shrubbery. He took a second more comprehensive look over the plateau. Then he worked his way back to the bewildered Hiram.

"See here, Dave Dashaway," challenged the latter, "you're acting mighty strange."

"What's the trouble here?" inquired Mr. King, coming up to the boys, pursuant to mysterious gestures from Hiram.

"It is trouble, I am very much afraid," replied Dave, seriously.

"What do you mean—about the airship?"

"Yes, Mr. King. The *Albatross* seems to be all right, but about twenty men, all armed with guns, have our entire party cornered near some rocks."

"You don't say so!" cried the airman. "Let me have a look."

"Be careful, then," advised Dave. "It looks to me as if another band of these wild outlaws probably traced the searchlight, and have managed to catch our friends away from the airship. Anyway, our folks are helpless, and the strangers look fierce and dangerous."

All three of the adventurers crept through the fringe of underbrush and took a look across the plateau. They found the situation as Dave had described it to be. The strangers held Professor Leblance, Mr. Dale, Grimshaw and the others at bay. A big, rough-looking fellow, evidently the leader of the band, was talking animatedly to the Frenchman. The others of the intruders held their rifles in a way that threatened an attack if the captives showed any resistance.

"They may be the MacGuffins," whispered Hiram, intensely wrought up with excitement.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Dave. "Mr. King, let us try to get nearer to them."

"Yes, we may learn what is going on and give our friends some help, if they need it," replied the airman.

They had to cover half a mile in a cautious detour. This finally brought them to a thicket not thirty feet distant from their friends and enemies. Mr. King lay flat on the ground behind some high bushes, and his companions followed his example. Dave bent his ear keenly, to catch what the leader of the invading party was saying.

"That don't go with me," the man said. "How do we know that you ain't here to spy on us? We fine tresspassers here and we charge rent for the use of our property."

"You must own the whole state, you fellows must," snapped out Grimshaw."

"We run this district, if you want to know it," retorted the outlaw. "Usually we just string up spies."

"But we are no spies," declared the professor, earnestly.

"We don't take your word for that. Come, you've got to pay your reckoning. You scrape us up as much as two hundred dollars among you, or——"

The speaker waved his hand significantly in the direction of the *Albatross*.

"Yes," growled one of his fellows. "It wouldn't take us long to make a sieve of that contrivance."

"I resent this outrage!" cried the Frenchman, hotly. "We are under international protection.

Our mission is in the interests of science. If you interfere with us, you will rouse the entire community. It will be the worse for you."

"Hear him, boys," rallied the outlaw leader. "Say, stranger, who's going to tell what we did or didn't do to you, hey?"

The speaker grinned in a cold-blooded way that made Hiram Dobbs shiver.

"Say, Mr. King," he whispered hoarsely, "shoot them."

"One gun against twenty wouldn't count for much," responded the airman, with a shake of his head.

"I will pay no ransom, I will give you not one cent of blackmail," declared the doughty Frenchman, thoroughly indignant.

"All right, then we will ransack your old gas bag and take what we want," boasted the outlaw.

"I warn you," cried the professor. "The airship is one mass of devices you do not understand. You may find trouble."

"What do you bother with him for?" cried the man beside the last speaker. "We'll cover the rest of the crowd. You make him take you over the machine and get what's lying around loose."

"Can't we do something, Mr. King?" inquired the young aviator, in an anxious tone.

"I fear not, Dashaway," was the reply.

"These are desperate men and bound to have their own way. We can only hope that our being free will help our friends somewhere along the line."

"You come with me," ordered the outlaw leader, roughly seizing Professor Leblance by the arm and pulling him along. "Keep you eyes on those others," he added, to his men.

The Frenchman held back with resolute face and force. The outlaw, however, was a great, bulky fellow of enormous strength.

They had proceeded less than twenty feet towards the airship, when a quick word cut the air, clear and startling as a pistol shot.

"Halt!"

CHAPTER XIX

A MYSTERIOUS FRIEND

In an instant of time the whole complexion of affairs had changed. The young aviator and his two companions crouched, staring at the scene before them, which now seemed the stage setting to some intense drama.

"Hello!" gasped the excitable Hiram.

"What does that mean?" echoed Mr. King, in a truly astonished way.

Dave was quite as fully amazed and puzzled. Suddenly and unexpectedly a form had sprung into view just beyond one of the floats of the *Albatross*. It was that of a lithe person, young and energetic. To all appearance he was a negro, for hands and face at that distance were of seeming ebony hue.

This extraordinary person, a stranger to all who looked upon him, held leveled a short but heavy rifle. At once the watchers from the underbrush recognized it as one of several weapons provided for the arsenal of the giant airship before the *Albatross* had left Croydon.

"It's the magazine rifle Mr. Dale showed us!" exclaimed Hiram. "Who's the fellow holding it, and how did he get it?"

"Who is he, indeed?" murmured the airman, staring hard at the person who had so startlingly pronounced that mandatory word—"Halt!"

The outlaw leader had come to a dead stop. He dropped the arm of the professor, who took in this last strange incident of the moment in a very bewildered way.

"Stand still or I will fire," rang out now in clear, vibrant tones.

Those of the band guarding the rest of the crew of the *Albatross* stood mute and staring, taken aback by the determined and threatening attitude of the person near the balloon.

"If one of your men so much as raises a weapon, I will shoot," came floating distinctly on the still mountain air. "I hold a magazine rifle in my hand loaded for one hundred rounds, that will shoot eighty times in a minute. Order your men to put down their guns."

The outlaw leader hesitated. Bang! ten times in incredibly rapid succession at a light pressure the formidable magazine rifle rang out, aimed, however, at the boughs of a nearby tree, some of the leaves of which fell in scraps and ribbands under the destructive effect of the powerful fusillade.

"One, two, three—I can pick them off before they can raise a trigger!" shouted the sable champion of the airship crew. "I'll do it, too, if that order is not given double-quick."

The outlaw leader quailed. Then he turned and made a sign to his men. The last one of them placed his gun on the ground.

"March," came the inflexible order. "Down that path to the left, so we can keep you in view. You will find your weapons safe when you return and we are gone. Go!"

The menace of the powerful magazine rifle cowed the outlaw gang. The breathless spectators from the brush saw them join their leader unarmed, take the path as directed, and file away from the plateau.

The person who had so marvellously accomplished all this never lowered his weapon. Still holding it ready for instant use, he walked over to where a ledge of rocks rose like a sentinel tower above the level of the plateau. There posting himself, he held the discomfited retreating foe in constant sight. He swung his hand towards the stupefied crew of the airship. He spoke some order or suggestion to them that Dave did not overhear. The party, however, at once possessed themselves of some of the abandoned rifles of the outlaws and stood ready for attack and defence.

Mr. King arose and hurried over to where Professor Leblance stood, and Dave and Hiram followed him.

"Professor!" cried the airman. "Here are some strange happenings. Who is that person—not one of the crew?"

"I never saw him before," replied the dazed Frenchman. "He has saved us."

"And the *Albatross*. We have the quicksilver. This is a dangerous ruffian-infested district. Let us leave as soon as possible."

"Yes, yes," said the Frenchman, in a hurried tone. "After what has happened we cannot be too quickly nor fast on our way."

The animated engineer of the *Albatross* bustled about into immediate action. He ordered two of his men to join their rescuer on the rocks. All the others were impressed into service in assisting to get the giant airship ready for a new and longer flight.

It did not take fifteen minutes to accomplish this. One by one Professor Leblance told off his expert assistants to their duties. Dave and Hiram had been kept busy, but more than once the young aviator had glanced in the direction of the heroic figure on the rocks.

He saw the Frenchman say some quick words to Mr. King, and the latter then approach the stranger. Some conversation took place between

them. As a signal for starting was sounded from the engine room, Mr. King turned towards the airship. He was accompanied by the person with the magazine rifle.

All hands got quickly aboard. When the young aviator reached the cabin he found their mysterious friend seated in a shaded corner of the place. Then the activity and excitement of the ascent engrossed all minds.

The magificent *Albatross* arose in the air like a bird. It attained a high altitude. All the recent troubles of its crew faded away like light feather down.

Mr. King came into the cabin inside of half an hour, quickly followed by Professor Leblance. Both looked intensely curious. The *Albatross* safely started on a steady course, they had evidently hastened to explore the mystery of the strange friend who had aided them in their sorest need.

The airman approached the silent, timid-appearing figure in the corner of the cabin. He extended his hand warmly, grasping that of the shrinking stranger.

"My friend," he said, "come up to the table. We want to have a talk with you. You asked to be taken aboard, and said you would then explain your being here."

The stranger somewhat reluctantly took a chair

at the cabin table. For all his recent heroic attitude, he acted rather embarrassed and frightened now.

He looked down. Then he trembled visibly. And then he made the remarkable statement:

"I am a stowaway."

CHAPTER XX

THE STOWAWAY

THE young aviator took a long, earnest stare at the mysterious person who had just stated that he was a stowaway. In a flash Dave seemed to get hold of one end of a long chain of circumstances and mysteries.

"A stowaway?" repeated Professor Leblance, incredulously. "You mean aboard the *Albatross*?"

"Yes, sir."

"From the time when she first started?"

"And before."

"You amaze me!"

"I am amazed at myself," came the words, in rather a depressed way. The speaker dropped his head, and both of his interlocutors looked troubled and more puzzled than ever. "I'll tell you, gentlemen, I'd rather not say much till I am sure your airship is out of the country. You know you promised I should stay aboard if I wanted to," he added to Mr. King.

"I surely did," assented the airman, heartily.

Dave had been studying the profile of the stow-

away. He had noticed that his ebony hue was due entirely to soot or greased lampblack smeared over face and hands. Further, the keen glance of the young aviator had scanned closely the clothing, even down to the necktie of the stranger, and then—he was a stranger no longer to Dave.

"Mr. King, may I speak to you for a moment," said Dave, moving out of the cabin into a passageway. In some surprise the airman followed him there.

"What is it, Dashaway?" he asked.

"The stowaway. I know him, Mr. King," declared Dave, hurriedly. "There is a certain mystery about him he dares not explain just now, and you are embarrassing him dreadfully. Don't ask him any more questions. Tell him to come to my stateroom. Later, I will explain everything to you about him."

"Well, well," commented the airman; "you seem to have the faculty for preparing surprises for your friends, I must say. I'll do what you suggest, but I'm curious to understand what it all means."

"You shall soon know," promised the young aviator, and he went to the little partitioned-off space where he and Hiram slept. He sat down on one of the berths, placing a stool in the middle of the room for his expected guest.

"You will find a friend in there," reached

Dave's ear, a little later, in the tones of the airman.

"Did—did you want to speak to me?" rather falteringly asked the stowaway, entering the stateroom. Mr. King retired and closed the door after him.

"Why, yes," replied Dave pleasantly. "Say," and he grasped the hand of his guest in a hearty way, "I am glad to see you, and doubly glad because you have made good, just as I knew you would. I once told a friend you were of the right kind. You've proved it, Elmer Brackett, and I'm proud of you."

"Yes, I see you know me. Made good! Proud of me?" repeated the boy in a dazed, half-stunned way.

"Why, you saved the *Albatross,* didn't you?" cried the young aviator, in a spirited tone, bound to rouse and buoy up his guest. "The lives, too, probably, of every person aboard. What are you crying for—joy?"

Sure enough, young Brackett was crying. He acted like a boy in such a tangle of circumstances that he was fairly crushed. Finally he blurted out:

"Joy? None of that for me, ever again, I guess."

"Why not?" challenged Dave.

"Oh, you don't know, you don't know!" cried

the young man. "It seems as I sit here, in the strangest position a fellow ever was in, I reckon, that I'm in some terrific dream. There's only one clear idea I can cling to—to get out of the country, away—away——"

"Away from that villain, Vernon? Am I right?" spoke Dave, quickly.

"Yes, that's it," assented Brackett, in a lost tone of voice.

"I thought so. Now then, see here, you are among the best friends any fellow ever had. You have just been the best kind of a hero ever was. Forget everything else for the present. Make up your mind that whatever your troubles may be, there's a combination aboard the *Albatross* strong enough to help you fight your way clear out of the last one of them, and—tell me all about it."

There followed the most interesting hour of Dave Dashaway's life. The friend of everybody, he had been the confidant and helper of many a lad in difficulties. As bit by bit the strange history of Elmer Brackett came out, however, Dave conceded that it was the most remarkable case he had ever handled.

Briefly, the reckless, impetuous son of the big man in the Interstate Aero Company had become the helpless victim of the schemes of Vernon. Young Brackett did not tell Dave everything. He hinted that while in a muddled condition he had

been induced by Vernon to forge a number of notes.

Once completely in the power of the schemer, the latter showed no mercy. He appalled Brackett by claiming that he could send him to the penitentiary, disgrace his family, and almost ruin his father's business. These claims were, in a measure, exaggerations.

Elmer Brackett then lost his head completely. His one thought was to escape from Vernon. He disguised himself, after sending a letter to his father, warning him against the forgeries, and saying he was going to seek some foreign country where he could lose himself and be forgotten.

"I had no money, I dared not appeal to friends, for Vernon was seeking for me everywhere to tighten the chains of his power around me," related the youth, bitterly. "I thought of you, and while tracing down the *Albatross* I ran across Davidson and young Dawson and their *Dictator*. Maybe it was a wild idea, but I thought how it would just suit me to get away from this country by airship, for Vernon had claimed that if I left him he would have the detectives looking out for me everywhere. Well, I hung around Senca. Then, as I didn't think much of the way the *Dictator* showed up, I went to Croydon."

"It was you, then, who asked my friend, Hiram Dobbs, about me, and wore a false mustache?"

"Yes, I was disguised," admitted Brackett.

"And you were, too, the ghost who scared the watchman at the *Albatross* aerodrome nearly into fits!"

"That was me, too," admitted Brackett. "The night before you started I sneaked aboard the airship. I stowed myself away behind the big boxes of provisions near the cabin here. I heard and saw what was going on. Then that crowd of outlaws came, I got the magazine gun from the arsenal, and—here I am."

"And here you wish to stay till we get across the Atlantic?" said the young aviator. "Good! Now, then, take my advice; forget all this wretched fear and trouble that is part of your past. Help us win the great prize, and when this trip is over trust to it that Mr. King and Mr. Dale will find time and money to squelch this miserable Vernon, straighten out your affairs, and start you on a new career."

Elmer Brackett, minus the lampblack and encouraged by Dave, was soon quite another person in appearance and spirits to the refugee stowaway. Dave imparted to his friends only as much of Brackett's story as was necessary.

The following morning the boys awoke to find the *Albatross* out of all sight of land, fairly started on the great trip across the broad Atlantic.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HAUNTED AIRSHIP

"SAY, fellows, this is life on the ocean wave worth seeing, isn't it?"

Hiram Dobbs spoke the words, and his auditors and jolly companions were the young aviator and Elmer Brackett. It was the second evening out of sight of land. The *Albatross* had made splendid speed, and the machinery had acted like a charm. Just about dusk, however, Professor Leblance had ordered a drop to lower level.

"There is a low barometric pressure," Dave Dashaway had heard him say to Mr. King. "There is bound to be a change in the air currents shortly, and I want to determine our course from the way they act. There are some repairs to make, also, and we will slow down for at least two hours."

The boys were immensely interested in the manœuvers of their craft under the direct manipulation of the professor. The *Albatross* was brought to the surface of the water, resting on its

floats as easily and gracefully as the great ocean bird it was named after. A hint from the cook sat Hiram thinking. Fresh fish would come in very acceptably for breakfast next morning, he told Dave, and the trio decided to take the lighter of the two boats and see what they could catch.

Mr. King warned them to keep within hailing range of the airship and provided them with trolling lines. The young aviator and Elmer plied the oars and Hiram did the fishing. He was gloating over the occasion with satisfaction, and made the enthusiastic remark which heads the chapter as he deposited a final catch, a fat codfish, in the bottom of the boat.

"That will do, Hiram," directed Dave. "We have got more fish already than we can use in a week, and some of them look as if they were not in the eating class. The cook will know."

"Yes, and see, we are quite a distance from the *Albatross,*" put in Elmer.

A weird warning wind sang about them just then. The boys had been so engrossed in their sport they had failed to notice that some scudding clouds had obliterated the stars.

"Get to work, Elmer," ordered Dave, picking up the oars. "We, must be a full mile from the *Albatross.*"

"Yes, and maybe that storm Professor Le-

blance told about is going to catch us," remarked Elmer, he too getting in shape for a row back to the airship.

The minor headlight of the *Albatross* guided them, and for this, a dim spark in the distance, the little yawl was headed. The water had become choppy, but the oarsmen felt equal to the task of the moment.

"Just see that!" shouted Hiram, as a phosphorescent streak crossed their course. "It's like a streak of fire."

"There's another one ahead," said Elmer.

"Yes, and look! look!" exclaimed Hiram. "It's a shoal of fishes. Big fellows, too. Say, see them leap out of the water."

It was a stimulating sight and a novel one to the boys. They were now within less than a quarter of a mile of the airship. As Hiram spoke, the big searchlight of the *Albatross* suddenly flared up. It signalled the boys to return, as Dave understood it.

"Say, I'm going to make a throw for one of those big fellows," declared Hiram.

"Don't do it. Whew!" exclaimed Elmer. "They are big fellows. Did you feel that?"

Some object had landed against the side of the yawl, nearly tipping it.

"It's a big fish, almost as big as a shark!" shouted Hiram. "They're chasing the smaller

ones. Whoop! I've caught something. Hurrah! Slow down! Oh, the mischief!"

All in a fleeting second the excited lad shouted out, tugged at the trolling line, bracing his feet against the bottom of the boat, and then—flop! splash!

"Stop the boat!" rang out the voice of the young aviator, sharply, for Hiram, his hand tangled in the trolling line, had been pulled clear over the end of the yawl. His startled comrades saw him disappear, and strove staunchly to put the boat about. As the craft half turned, there was a shock and a crash.

A giant fish, perhaps a shark, had struck the boat amidship. The craft was splintered in half as quick as a flash. The next minute the young aviator and his companion were struggling in the water.

The big marine monster had apparently gone straight on its way in pursuit of a disappearing phosphorescent mass. Dave grabbed out at the one floating half of the wrecked yawl.

"This way—Hiram! Elmer!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"I'm here," panted Elmer, as he reached Dave's side and grasped the edge of the floating wreck.

"Where's Hiram?"

"U-um! Thunder!" puffed the individual in

question. "I'm safe, but my big catch got away, line and all."

"Never mind that now," replied Dave. "We're in a serious fix, fellows."

"And all the fish in the boat gone, too," mourned Hiram, dolefully.

"See here, both of you," ordered Dave, decisively, "don't waste any time. We don't know what kind of danger hovers about us. Yell!"

"Good and loud!" agreed Hiram, letting out a terrific warwhoop. The others chorused in. Dave believed that their forlorn hail might have some effect.

"They've heard us," cried Hiram, joyfully.

"Yes, here she comes," added Elmer, in a relieved tone.

The searchlight on the *Albatross* was suddenly shifted. Its broad, groping rays were focussed on the sea, searching for the castaways. The glowing pencils of light came nearer and nearer. Finally the full dazzling gleam swept the wreck and those clinging to it, and rested on it.

"They have seen us," declared the young aviator, as the searchlight maintained a full focus directly upon them.

"And what next?" inquired Hiram.

"We will have to wait and see," replied Dave.

Relief and rescue came almost magically quick. The larger yawl of the *Albatross* glided across the

broad path of light, the veteran airman, the anxious Grimshaw and two others its occupants.

"This ends all experiments in the fishing line," declared Mr. King. "It is a wonder some of those sharks did not attack you."

"The searchlight probably scared them away," suggested Grimshaw.

The adventure furnished a fruitful theme for discussion when the boys were once more back in the comfortable cabin of the airship. Hiram, however, continued to expatiate on his great catch and greater loss.

"I'll bet it was a dolphin pulled me out of the boat," he declared. "Just think of it, fellows—catching a dolphin! That's something to brag about."

A storm set in within the hour and the *Albatross* speedily sought a higher level. All the boys knew about it was what Mr. King told them the next morning. The pleasing swaying motion of the giant craft had lulled them to sound and refreshing slumber.

It was again after dark the next evening when the cook came into the cabin, and looked at Mr. King in a manner that made the airman inquire curiously:

"What's on your mind, Demys?"

"Why, I found a window broken in the room just beyond the larder," reported the cook.

"Hailstone, maybe," said Mr. King, casually; "you know we had some last night."

"Yes, I know that," replied the man. "Later to-day I noticed two more panes of glass cracked right across."

"Perhaps the big strain of the wind in the storm last night weakened them," suggested the airman.

"Maybe," assented the cook, vaguely. "Funny thing, though. I set a pan of beans in the room to cool before supper. When I went after them just now I found nearly half of them gone."

"Is that so, now?" questioned Mr. King, beginning to get interested.

"Say, don't you suppose it was rats?" propounded the quick-thinking Hiram.

"No, sir!" declared the cook definitely. "I have never noticed a trace of rats in the *Albatross*."

"Then I'll bet it's another stowaway—say, just like Elmer here was."

All hands laughed abruptly at this unique piece of guesswork.

"I reckon I was the only intruder aboard, Hiram," remarked Elmer, good-naturedly.

"Well, the beans are gone and somebody ate them," said the cook. "It couldn't be anybody of the crew, for no one has passed through the

galley but myself, and the room I speak of is beyond it."

"Suppose we investigate?" suggested the young aviator.

"That's it," agreed the impetuous Hiram. "Come on, fellows."

All hands followed the cook to his quarters. They inspected the galley and then entered the room beyond it. Sure enough, there was the dish of beans, nearly half its original contents missing.

Hiram and Elmer explored every nook and corner of the place where there was the least opportunity for a stowaway to hide. Their search was without results.

"It's certainly something of a mystery," decided the young aviator. "Those cracked windows, too. Why," he added, examining them closely, "it looks as though some one had deliberately hammered on them until they gave way, as you see."

There was another sensation the next evening. The cook came rushing into the cabin. Mr. King happened to be on hand.

"I'm getting superstitious and scared," declared the cook.

"What's up now?" interrogated the airman.

"Enough for anybody's nerves," reported the man. "Sounds, scrapings, sort of low groans.

I'm beginning to believe the airship is haunted."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. King. "When did you hear these strange noises you describe?"

"Just now. See here, some of you come with me and see if you can figure this thing out."

The boys were ready enough for the investigation. The cook led them to the galley, and they sat down as he put out all the lights.

"Now keep perfectly quiet and listen patiently," directed the young aviator.

"There's something," spoke Hiram in a hoarse whisper, as a queer cooing sound came from the watched room. "Gently, now," he added and crept through the doorway.

There was a fluttering sound. Dave traced it to a corner of the room where there were some boxes. The noise came from behind them. He groped with his hand, and his fingers finally grazed a feathery, shrinking object.

"Flare a light," he called out instantly. "I've caught the stowaway."

"Who is it? what is it?" cried Hiram, rushing forward as the electric lights were turned on.

"Why, it's a bird—a pigeon," announced Dave, dragging into view a ruffled, timid dove. "Here's your mystery explained. The bird must have been driven through the broken window during that storm the other night. The poor

thing was famished and ate the beans. Then it cracked the window panes trying to get out again."

"You've got it, Dave," declared Hiram, "only, say, what is that fastened under its wing?"

"Why, sure enough," said Dave, observing what looked like an oilskin package fastened with silk cord under the wing of the bird. "Fellows, this must be a carrier dove. We must see Mr. King about this."

The airman inspected the oilskin package. He read a written enclosure it contained.

"This is a trained passenger pigeon," he said. "Started from Rio de Janeiro and carrying a message to its former home in Washington. Feed up the bird, boys, and we'll send the brave little thing again on its journey."

The next morning when the carrier pigeon was set free, started landwards, it bore a second message. This told the world that the giant airship was eight hundred miles on its trip across the broad Atlantic.

CHAPTER XXII

FIRE AT SEA

"WELL, Dave, they stole a march on us last night."

"How is that, Hiram?" questioned the young aviator.

"Landed. Yes, sir, the *Albatross* made a landing about midnight on the beach of some island—Bermuda or Bahama, or something like that. Last point of land this side of Europe, the professor says. Took on a fresh supply of water. Mr. King visited the town nearby and got some papers, and sent a message to the aero association."

Hiram had just come from the cabin, preceding his comrade in waking up by a few minutes. When the two friends went to the cabin they found young Brackett waiting to take breakfast with them.

A few days had made a marked change in the new passenger of the *Albatross*. Everybody was pleasant and encouraging to him. He had become greatly interested in the workings of the

airship. Dave had suggested to him that, owing to the fact that his father was a foremost manufacturer in the aeroplane line, he had a splendid opportunity to begin business life in the same field.

The *Albatross* had started out on its real voyage in fine shape, weather conditions being perfect. So far, except for the adventure among the mountain men of North Carolina, not one adverse incident had marred the flight.

The three friends chatted and joked buoyantly while dispatching their appetizing meal. Young Brackett had picked up one of the newspapers brought to the airship from the island just after midnight. He was looking it over casually, when he uttered a quick cry as of startled amazement.

"It's not true!" he almost shouted, and he brought his fist down upon the table to emphasize the remark with such force that the dishes rattled.

"What's not true, Brackett?" inquired the young aviator, in some surprise.

"Listen!" called out the lad in considerable excitement, and then he read from the newspaper:

"Another red, white and blue float was picked up three hundred miles from land by the steamer *Royale*. It proved to contain a dispatch with the readings: 'Aug. 21, altitude one thousand feet,

course due east, making splendid time. Airship *Dictator*: Signed, Roger Davidson, Perry Dawson, on board.' "

"That sounds like business," exclaimed Hiram. "The twenty-first. That's the day we started. They were forty-eight hours ahead of us.

"Not true!" again declared young Brackett, sharply.

"You mean?" asked Dave, in wonder.

"Davidson and Dawson are not aboard of the *Dictator*."

"Oh, pshaw, now how can you say that;" challenged the impetuous Hiram, "when here is the clear evidence?"

"You seem to know something we don't know," remarked Dave, with a close glance at Brackett. "The public prints announced that Davidson and Dawson started with the *Dictator* on the trip across the Atlantic on the afternoon of the nineteenth."

"They did," nodded Bracket. "I saw them. But they came back."

"What's that?" cried Hiram.

"Yes, they did."

"In the *Dictator*?"

"Oh, no, and that's the queer part of it. They may have lost their nerve—it looks that way. They may have hired someone else to take the

risk of the trip. Anyhow, they got out of the *Dictator* after leaving Senca, and came back there at midnight. I slept that night in the place where they had built the *Dictator*. I saw them come, I saw them go away."

"Brackett, you astonish me," said Dave, bluntly. "Are you sure of what you say?"

"Perfectly," declared the lad, with positiveness. "Davidson and Dawson came secretly to the old aerodrome. They had a big automobile, and loaded into it a long box. Both were disguised, and I recognized them only by their voices. I heard them speak of getting to the steamer. How to explain these dispatches, apparently dropped from the *Dictator* into the ocean, I don't know. I've only told you what I do know."

"Mr. King must know of this," said Dave, thoughtfully.

No plausible solution of the tangle was arrived at, however. Amid the sheer exhileration and activity of their own superb flight, the crew of the *Albatross* soon forgot the incident surrounding the rival airship with new mystery.

For two days and nights the giant airship made an even, steady run, true as a needle to a set course. There was a slight mist over the waters the next evening. So fair and promising was the weather, that Professor Leblance had deviated

from the route he had first laid out. He had made an aerial short cut. The result was that they were somewhat out of the regular path of ocean travelers.

It was always a pleasure for the boys to watch out nights for the steamers far beneath them. That night, Grimshaw, seated at one of the windows, remarked in his usual laconic way:

"Light ahoy!"

"Where away?" chirped the active Hiram, who was priding himself on becoming quite nautical.

"Just ahead, somewhat to the southeast."

"I see it," said the young aviator.

"So do I," joined in Hiram. "Why, say," he added, excitedly a minute or two later, "that's no light. It's a fire."

As they progressed and the radiance became plainer, all hands decided that Hiram was right. Nearer and nearer they came to the growing light. Flames became visible, then the fire fringed the outlines of hull and rigging.

Dave ran to the pilot room and quickly advised Mr. King of the circumstance. Professor Leblance was summoned from the engine room.

"Slow down and focus the searchlight on the ship," he ordered.

This was done. It was a vivid and exciting scene. The great fingers of radiance went grop-

ing all about the craft. No one seemed aboard. No one seemed struggling in the waves about the ship.

Fast to its stern, however, by a long cable and thus held in position, was a rude raft. The searchlight showed a man standing upon this and viewing the blazing ship. At his feet, covered over with a tarpaulin, there seemed to be another human form.

"We cannot leave those people to their fate," said the Professor. "Mr. King, we will drop the floats and stop, while you and the boys take the emergency yawl and go after whoever may be aboard of that raft."

The *Albatross* rested its floats lightly upon the water and skimmed it slowly at an even height, like the royal bird after which it was named.

The handling of the yawl was of a piece with the operation of all the perfect utilities of the airship. The three boys took the oars and the airman acted as pilot.

Just as they got near to the raft they saw the man standing upright upon it, sever the cable holding it to the burning ship. The heat from the flames had evidently become too intense for him to bear. Then he posed in an attitude of suspense and eagerness, a wiry, keen-eyed little man. He had a long, oval metal box strapped across his shoulder, and was dripping wet.

"Good for you!" he hailed, as the airman grappled the raft with a boathook.

"Ship caught fire, did it?" remarked Mr. King.

"No, I set it."

The yawl crew stared almost unbelievingly at the man as he made this statement, but he went on calmly:

"I had to. She's water logged, and bound to sink the first capful of breeze that hits her."

"Where are the passengers and crew?" asked the airman.

"Abandoned her early this morning. I was down in the cabin getting this"—and the speaker tapped the tin box as though it contained something precious. "They missed me, and were away in the boat before I knew it."

"But the fire?"

"I made this raft ready against the ship scuttling. Thought I'd fire the ship for a signal for help. You see it did some good."

"Well, get aboard," ordered the airman.

"What about him?" inquired the shipwrecked man, and he pointed to the tarpaulin on the raft.

"Someone there?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"A man I rescued not an hour ago. He lay across a wooden grating, floating along past the

ship. His head is bleeding, and he is unconscious."

Mr. King directed Dave and Hiram to assist in lifting the insensible man to the yawl. The latter was limp and lifeless as some water logged rat. They placed him in the bottom of the yawl and resumed their oars.

"See here," spoke the man with the tin box, "the best you can do for me is a sky sailor, is it?"

"That, or nothing," replied the airman.

"Where are you bound for?"

"Across the Atlantic, for Europe."

"I knew it would come some day," observed the rescued man quite coolly. "You see, I'm an inventor myself. I've got in that tin box patents for a new kind of color photography that will make me millions. I'm not altogether poor just now, either, and if you set me and my patents safe on *terra firma* almost anywhere, I'll pay a handsome reckoning."

Within the hour the rescued men were hoisted safely into the airship and the yawl replaced in position. The unconscious man had been carried into one of the staterooms. Professor Leblance had quite a smattering of medicine. He examined the patient, prepared some remedies from a medicine chest the craft carried, and came into the cabin to report to Mr. Dale.

"A very sick man. What water and exposure have not done, a bad cut on the head has. He is delirious and in a weak and feverish condition. I would suggest that you in the cabin here take turns in caring for him."

All hands were agreeable to this. In the excitement and bustle of the rescue, Dave and the others had not particularly noticed the sufferer. Dave had scarcely entered the place where the patient lay, however, with Hiram, when he gave a great start. He stood with his eyes fixed on the man, as he spoke hurriedly to his comrade.

"Go to Mr. King and tell him to come here at once."

"What is it, Dashaway?" inquired the airman, appearing a few minutes later.

"Look, Mr. King," said the young aviator, pointing to the prostrate man; "who is he?"

"Impossible!" ejaculated Mr. King, starting back. "Why, it's Roger Davidson!"

There was no doubt of the fact. In turn Grimshaw, young Brackett and even Hiram confirmed the identification.

"Here's a new mystery for you," admitted Mr. King, coming into the cabin an hour later. "The clothes that man wore show little adaptability to airship work. In one of his pockets I found the main stub of a steamship ticket. He never fell from any airship. I can account for his extra-

ordinary appearance upon the scene in one way only."

"And that?" questioned Mr. Dale.

"Is that he was lost off some ocean steamer. One thing certain—the *Dictator* never started across the Atlantic with this man in charge."

For three days Davidson lay insensible most of the time. Meanwhile the *Albatross* coursed its way without accident or delay. All hands were delighted over the success thus far of their wonderful enterprise. They passed the three-quarters distance mark with every prospect of reaching goal in splendid trim.

It was a cool, cloudy and misty night, and both the professor and airman were on close guard on account of the changed weather conditions. The boys were reading in the cozy cabin. Grimshaw and Mr. Dale had gone to bed, and everything seemed proceeding smoothly in engine and pilot rooms. Finally Hiram looked up from his book.

"We are surely going to make it," he remarked. "The professor says that it will be a clean shoot ahead for land first thing in the morning."

"I can hardly realize that there is every chance of reaching the goal and winning the prize," observed the young aviator.

"Say, what was that?" abruptly interjected young Brackett.

There had come a sudden shock. It resembled a wrench, a shiver; as if some vital part of the giant mechanism had met with disaster.

"Something wrong!" cried Dave, springing to his feet.

At that moment a blood-curdling yell echoed through the airship.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FORLORN HOPE

HIRAM and Brackett joined the young aviator in a rush for the passageway leading to the pilot room. It was from that direction that the cry had echoed.

A sharp, double danger signal rang out from the engine room. There were sounds of distant shouts. The yell was repeated. Some keen intuition drove Dave to the stateroom which had served as invalid ward for the man rescued from the raft.

"Hiram," cried the young aviator, "Davidson is gone!"

"Why, it can't be! Say—whew! supose he's gone wild, and is rambling all over the ship among that machinery!"

Snap—crack! Following upon the echoes of that second terrific cry, a disturbing thing had happened—every electric light in the *Albatross* went out!

To add to the confusion and terror of the

moment, in the direction of the engine room there rang out a thumping, crashing sound, as if some disjointed part of the machinery was beating things to pieces like a steel flail.

"Stand still," ordered Dave, sharply, "don't try to grope about in the dark. It's no use."

The young aviator felt his way out into a corridor leading to the supply room. It was a fortunate thing that he had familiarized himself with everything about the place. Dave located a certain cabinet, and opening one of its drawers, took out what he was after—an armful of electric hand lights carrying their own batteries.

"Here, Hiram, Brackett," he called, flashing one of the tubes. "Take some of these. Follow me. I don't know that the people in the engine rooms have any way of getting a light. Let us hurry to them."

"Hold on!" shouted a new voice, and Grimshaw bolted upon the scene. "What's the trouble?"

"We don't know, but something pretty serious, I imagine," replied Dave, quickly. "Take these."

He furnished Grimshaw with two of the electric tubes. Then Dave led the way to the pilot room. He found Mr. King lighting matches to get some kind of illumination, and as ignorant themselves as to the condition of affairs. The aviator at once led a rush in the direction of the engine room.

They arrived at the ante-chamber leading to it to come upon a stirring scene.

A small hand lamp only illuminated the apartment. It contained four men, the professor, two of his assistants, and these latter were holding to the floor and battling with and binding hand and foot a wild, struggling maniac—Roger Davidson.

"He got loose!" cried the aviator, at once reading the situation.

"And in his frenzy has done terrible damage to the *Albatross*," exclaimed Professor Leblance, pale, disturbed and anxious-faced. "It is very serious, I fear. Get him away to the cabin as speedily as you can, and watch him every minute. You, Mr. King, resume your post at the pilot table. Dashaway, hurry all the spare light tubes here."

There was a shivery, uncertain wobble to the giant airship now. The prodigious construction resembled some monster machine that had received a vital wound. Dave hastened on his mission. As he returned to the engine room he passed Hiram, Brackett and one of the assistants, carrying Davidson back to the stateroom.

Mr. King was at his post at the pilot table, and looked worried and helpless. The electric apparatus of the airship having been destroyed, he could only sit and use the speaking tubes.

Dave found the engine room in hideous dis-

order. The engine was not in operation, and parts of it were all out of order. The professor and his men were getting a reserve engine in shape. For over an hour, silently, and deeply engrossed in all that was going on, the young aviator placed the light tubes as directed, and brought this and that tool and machine-fitting to the workmen as Professor Leblance ordered.

Dave saw the new engine started up. The professor held a long, whispered conversation with one of his men. Then he beckoned to Dave and led the way to the pilot room.

The Frenchman sank into a chair there, his face gray and careworn. They were three anxious ones. Leblance passed his hand over his eyes wearily, as if he had gone through a terrible ordeal.

"Well?" said the aviator simply.

"That maniac threw an iron bar into the machinery. He has ruined everything," announced Leblance.

"But the new engine?"

"Can only operate the rudder control. The entire mechanism is practically destroyed, my friends. I must not conceal from you that the situation is desperate, dangerous, almost hopeless!"

"But we are still running, Professor?" submitted the aviator.

"With one forlorn hope in view."

"Of reaching the end of our voyage?"

"That we can never hope for," declared the Frenchman, in a gloomy tone.

"Then—what?" bluntly demanded the aviator.

Leblance arose to his feet, running one hand over his eyes with a swift movement as if to restore impaired vision or brush away tears. He proceeded to a map attached to the wall just above the pilot table. His fingers traced the course already traversed by the *Albatrose*.

"We are here," he said, halting the faltering index. "Ahead, observe, is an island. It is two hundred miles southwest of the coast of France. We may possibly reach it by exhausting every utility we possess. If we do not, within the next forty-eight hours——"

The professor shrugged his shoulders slowly, sadly this time. An expression of ineffable solemnity crossed his noble face.

He pointed down as if indicating unknown depths waiting to swallow them up. Then he again ran his finger across the map, pausing at that little dark speck that marked the island.

"A change of wind," he said, "a single break in the apparatus, a trifling leak, and we are at the mercy of the mishap of our lives! That island—it is our last forlorn hope!"

CHAPTER XXIV

GOAL!

"It's too bad," said Hiram, and the young aviator's assistant was very nearly at the point of tears.

"We can only make the best of it," returned Dave, trying to be philosophical. "At any rate, we made a grand run."

"Yes, it's something to beat the world's record, even half the way," agreed Hiram. "But think of it—only for that awful break of Davidson we'd have won the day!"

The two young airmen sat outside of a wretched little hotel, a part of a remote fishing town on the island that had been "the forlorn hope" of the *Albatross*. The giant airship had succeeded in reaching it.

As Dave sat rather gloomily reviewing experience and prospects, he could not help but think of the past two nights and a day with a thrill. That had been a desperate, hair-breadth dash of the crippled airship. Without knowing all the technical details of their situation, Dave had read from the tireless, feverish actions of Professor Le-

blance, that he was rushing the *Albatross* under a fearful strain of risk and suspense, momentarily dreading a new and final disaster.

Before daylight, with a flabby gas bag and with the reserve engine barely able to work the propellers, the *Albatross* had settled down on a desolate stretch of beach, practically a wreck.

"The mechanism has played out completely," Leblance had asserted. "According to the regulations of the international society, the flight must end on the French or English mainland. We are two hundred miles short. We might as well be two thousand."

"Is there no possible chance of getting new machinery, of making temporary repairs that will tide us over?" suggested Mr. King.

"Impossible, under days, even weeks," replied the Frenchman. "On the rule schedule a stay at any point over twelve hours cancels the right of entry."

It was, indeed, too bad—so near to success, so very close to goal! A profound gloom had spread over every member of the airship crowd. The islanders had viewed the strange craft with excited curiosity at first, and had then gone back to their fishing. Davidson had been removed to a room at the little hotel, young Brackett in charge as his nurse, and all the others had taken up their quarters as well.

The young aviator and his comrade had been discussing the situation seated on an overturned boat. Hiram at length arose with a dreary kind of sigh and strolled aimlessly back towards the hotel. Dave sat thinking deeply. He started up, however, as he saw Brackett coming towards him.

"Dashaway," he said quite excitedly, "I've got to get back to my charge, don't dare to leave him alone, you know but I wanted you to read something," and the speaker extended some folded sheets of paper.

"Why, what is this?" inquired the young aviator.

"You know I understand shorthand—humph! it's about all I am good for, I reckon," added Elmer, in his usual deprecating way. "Well, for the past hour or two my patient has been saying some strange things."

"What about?" asked Dave—"the *Dictator* and Jerry Dawson, I suppose?"

"You've guessed it. I've written out his ramblings in long hand. I fancy your quick mind will weave a pretty startling story out of it all."

"There's the professor," said Dave abruptly, "I'll read your notes later, Brackett," and he thrust the sheets into his pocket, and started towards the beach as he saw Professor Leblance leave the hotel, bound in the same direction.

The failure of the ambitious Frenchman had almost crushed him. Dave felt sorry for him as he noted the drooping head and dejected manner of the scientist. He did not approach him closely, but followed him at a distance. As they rounded some rocks the *Albatross* came into full view.

Professor Leblance, walking slowly, gazed with sadness upon the inert monster of the air. Then he looked up at a hail. A fisherman was running towards him. Dave noticed the professor brace up magically at the first words of the native. The latter pointed to the air and the sea. His pantomine was expressive and energetic.

There came a sudden blast of wind, and then Dave understood. He noticed the professor start on a keen run for the *Albatross*. He was up the trailing rope ladder sprightly as a lad, shouting some orders to the fisherman, who ran towards the guy cable attached to a great tree trunk.

"It can't be possible," almost gasped the startled young airman, "that Professor Leblance is thinking of trusting to the wind alone to finish the flight. It's true! I won't be left behind!"

Dave caught at the ladder just as the propeller began to whir. By the time he was in the cabin the earth was fading away. He threaded the corridors in the direction of the engine room.

"Dashaway!" shouted the professor in amazement, as the young airman burst in upon him.

"Yes, Professor, I am here," said Dave. "You are going to make a try to reach the mainland? I am with you."

There was no time for compliments, explanations or delay. In two minutes' time the professor had made his assistant aware of what was required of him. Practically only as a balloon could the *Albatross* now act, and only provided the strong wind maintained in precisely the direction it was now set.

"See, my friend," spoke Leblance, eagerly, "we have no control whatever over the planes. The steering apparatus, too, is useless. The engine will barely take care of the propellers. If you know how to operate them, take my seat here. Keep the rudder locked firm. That is all we can do. For the rest—it is a risk, a perilous risk."

"Anything to get there!" cried Dave; and then the professor left him alone.

The *Albatross* had risen to a good altitude at her first spurt. She drove with the wind at a wonderful rate of speed. At the end of an hour, however, the young aviator noticed a gradual drop. The buoyancy of the gas bag was lessening.

After that Dave heard the professor working with tools below the cabin. He was quite startled as there was a jerk. Then he saw first one and then the other of the aeroplane attachments go

hurtling down to the water, engulfed by the ocean.

Relieved of such an incubus the airship regained a higher level. Two hours went by, then three. The professor appeared in a great state of excitement and hopefulness.

"She's dropping again, but don't let up for an instant," he ordered. "I see the land ahead—two hours more, and we've made it."

"Will the gas last?" inquired the young aviator, seriously.

"I am about to free our final reserve—one tank. That will do for a spell. Then— if I have to explode the balloonets into the main gas chamber, we must keep aloft till we are over land."

Up—down—up—down—that was the progress for the next two hours. Once it was nearly a volplane drift, and the dauntless young pilot of the *Albatross* fancied they were headed for a dive straight into the ocean's depths.

A final rise, and Dave's heart cheered as he saw land not two miles distant. Professor Leblance rushed into the engine room.

"Drift!" he ordered—"let her drop as she likes now—we have arrived!"

The brave old scientist tottered from excitement and exhaustion as he spoke. A great, thrilling cheer seemed to lift from the lips of the young aviator, and ten minutes later the *Albatross*, a

wobbling, flabby, weather-worn wreck, landed on a great dock in the sight of waiting thousands.

"Boy," spoke Professor Leblance, in a ringing tone and with sparkling eyes, "we have reached goal! The giant airship has crossed the Atlantic!"

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

"THIS is Professor Leblance, I believe? We have been expecting you, sir."

"And this is my friend and co-worker, David Dashaway," spoke the French scientist, proudly.

It was thirty-six hours after the giant airship had landed on French soil. Within that space of time rapid and interesting events had been crowded into the experience of the young American aviator.

At once after the landing, the professor had sought out the nearest resident representative of the French Aero Association. This individual had officially verified the arrival of the *Albatross*. Armed with the necessary credentials, Leblance and his young assistant had started at once for London.

Their destination, now reached, was the International Aero Institute, with whom trans-Atlantic negotiations had been made before the *Albatross* started on its trip. The French official had wired about the coming of the distinguished visitors.

Now Dave Dashaway, like the professor, arrayed in a handsome new suit of clothes, stood in the office of one of the most noted organizations in the aero world.

The first flush of the recent triumph still dwelt with Dave. Then there flashed over his mind the marvelous contrast between the present moment and less than six months previous. Then he had been the obscure down-trodden ward of a cruel guardian. Now through a mist of grateful tears the young aviator thought tenderly of the right royal friends who had assisted in crossing the Atlantic in the giant airship and who had loyally helped him to become the honored guest of men famous the world over for science and intelligent adventure.

The secretary of the club who had greeted them stood aside with a courteous bow to usher them into the reception room of the club. As he did so he said:

"We are proud to greet you, Professor. Your exploit will live in history, notwithstanding that you are second in the remarkable feat of crossing the Atlantic in an airship."

The sensitive Frenchman recoiled as though dealt a blow.

"How?" he cried sharply. "Second? what does this mean?"

"You had not heard? Ah, yes, the *Dictator,*

pilot J. E. Dawson, landed near Plymouth day before yesterday. After a terrible trip, clinging to the mere rag of a gas bag, Dawson was found nearly drowned on the seashore."

Professor Leblance sank to a chair stupefied. He stared like a man stunned into vacancy. He was completely overcome.

A strange expression crossed the face of the young aviator. Impulsively his hand went to a certain document that Elmer Brackett had given him two days before. His eye grew more steady, his lips more firm.

"Will you kindly give me a few details of the *Dictator* flight," he requested, "while Professor Leblance recovers from his surprise?"

It was a brief story. The red, white and blue gas bag had landed near Plymouth. The daring pilot was discovered clinging to it, drenched to the skin. He had been feted, honored, brought to London. He was even now in the next room, relating his wonderful adventures to the president and directors of the club.

"Come, Professor Leblance," said Dave, in a clear, steady tone, "I have something to say to this wonderful J. E. Dawson."

"Professor Lebance and Mr. Dashaway, of the *Albatross*," introduced the secretary, a minute later.

Lolling in a luxurious armchair in the midst of

some braggadocio recital, with a startled jerk Jerry Dawson came upright as though electrified.

The eye of the young aviator rested upon him with a fixedness that made him squirm.

"Happy to meet you, Professor Leblance," greeted the club official. "You share a most glorious exploit with our guest."

"One word first," interrupted Dave, amazed at his own firmness of voice and nerve. "So there may be no later misunderstanding, does that young man, whom I recognize as a Mr. Dawson, claim to have arrived first in the race across the Atlantic?"

"Most assuredly," responded the club president.

"His claim is unfounded," declared the young aviator in a calm, even tone, but with great positiveness. "He is an adventurer, a fraud. He crossed the Atlantic on the steamer *Alsatia.* The balloon found on the Plymouth coast is a duplicate of the *Dictator* which he brought along with him, and the original *Dictator,* after a brief land run, was purposely burned up fifty miles from New York city."

"Who says so?" shouted Jerry Dawson, getting excitedly to his feet.

"Rodger Davidson," replied the young aviator, simply.

Jerry Dawson grew white to the lips. He foresaw the losing game, but still he blurted out:

"The proofs?"

"Gentleman," said Dave, "a cablegram will serve to order an investigation of the ashes of the *Dictator*. A living witness as to the shipboard experience of this young romancer can be brought to London as soon as our friends are reached."

"Why, if this is true, the club will be the laughing stock of the world," observed the president, bending a dark look on Jerry.

"I—I think I'll go and consult a lawyer about this insulting charge," ventured Jerry. "Let me out."

"No, we will kick you out, if this is all true!" shouted an angry director.

"You will remain here," said the president, firmly. "Your story, sir, the truthful one; or we shall hold you criminally for false representation."

Jerry was scared. Dave's resolute face daunted him most of all. He trembled and shivered. By degrees he confessed. He was taken to the office of the club to furnish a signed statement. Then he was turned loose on the streets of London—exit ingloriously Jerry Dawson!

The invalid wanderings of Davidson had supplied his nurse, Elmer Brackett, with a pretty

clear history of the plot to impose a duplicate *Dictator* on the public. While under the influence of a drug, Davidson had fallen from the steamer, and Jerry had thrown a grating after him. Perhaps the hope of securing all the international prize money for himself, had led Jerry to say nothing further about the accident.

There was a great celebration at a noted London hotel the week following. The most humble member of the crew of the *Albatross* was present.

Money and fame had come to them all. Dave Dashaway was the central figure with the public. Professor Leblance seemed to take most pride in the construction of the *Albatross*. Young, enterprising, popular, Dave, as the last man at the helm of the ill-fated *Albatross,* was the real hero of the event.

"Well, lads," said the happy Professor Leblance across the table to Dave, Hiram and Elmer, "you have now reached so high a notch in aeronautic science that you can go no further."

"Mistake," piped up the irrepressible Hiram.

"Oh, yes, a grave mistake, Professor," insisted young Brackett.

Dave Dashaway only smiled.

"Come, what's up with you young people?" challenged the good-natured Mr. King.

"Why," spoke the young aviator, "when we

go back home, and you have put that promised quietus on that rascal Vernon, we are going to Elmer's father and have him build for us a magnificent aeroplane that will beat anything ever before constructed."

"And the purpose?" inquired old Grimshaw, with a hopeful twinkle in his eye.

"Why," replied Dave, "our idea is to get up a great international race around the globe."

"That's it," jubilated the veteran airman. "I knew it would be something grand and original."

"Canada, Alaska, Siberia, Russia—finishing where we began," explained Dave Dashaway.

"Can it be done?"

"I think so."

"But the danger——"

"There was danger in crossing the mighty Atlantic."

"I know that. But to go around the world. You will meet all sort of strange people and get in many a tight situation, and——"

"But Dave Dashaway can do it, trust him," said Mr. Dale, proudly. "He is the son of his father—you can trust him."

"Oh, you can't beat Dave," cried Hiram. "His enemies have tried it, and failed, every time."

So we leave our young airmen, full of ardor and hope, with their wonderful plans. How the

same were carried out in a most remarkable aviation exploit, will be told in a succeeding volume, to be entitled, "Dave Dashaway Around the World; Or, A Young Yankee Aviator Among Many Nations."

"Only one Dave Dashaway in this world," said Hiram, to young Brackett.

"The best friend I ever had!" murmured the other. "One boy in a million!"

"Right you are!"

THE END

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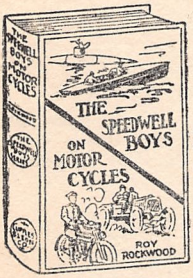

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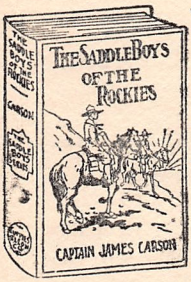

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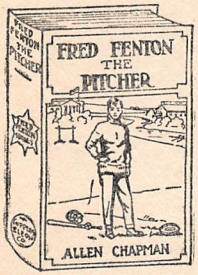

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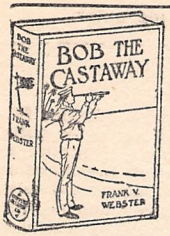

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